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THE CRESSET

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Contributors

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Above: Kenneth Callahan (American, born 1906), *Fossil Canyon,* 1959, watercolor, gouache on paper, mounted on masonite, 26-5/16" x 52". Valparaiso University Art Collections, Sloan Fund Purchase, S 62.1

Cover: Mark Tobey (American, 1890-1976), *Devoted,* 1970, acquatint, *Transitions* (Suite of 7), 32/75, 12-7/16" x 9-9/16". Valparaiso University Art Collections, University Fund Purchase, 81.8

For Mark Tobey and Kenneth Callahan, ultimate reality is indivisible. *Devoted* radiantly pulsates with an overall constancy of dark and light micro- or macroscopic units. *Fossil Canyon* joins earth, animals, and man to express something of "the truth which I feel lies in the interrelationship of all things in life—rocks, people, ideas, animals, galaxies, atoms—which all stem from one Godhead and which are all part of that Godhead, inevitable, interrelated." (Callahan) RHWB

IN LUCE TUA

Comment on Contemporary Affairs by the Editor

Gay Rights, Gay Wrongs

People can live with change. Indeed, they have no choice in the matter, since change is the only universal law of history. If there is a part of all of us that wishes that things would always remain the same, there is also in most of us a reality principle that recognizes that it cannot be so. What people cannot live with—what they will instinctively rebel against—is a fundamental revaluation of their moral universe. It is precisely that sort of fundamental revaluation that the gay rights movement has set out in pursuit of, and it is that, we think, which guarantees its failure.

Not that views on this issue remain as they were; they do not, and the changes have often been for the better. Much of the pathological anti-homosexuality that those of us over 40 grew up with has disappeared. There is no longer open season for gay-bashing, and most people are willing to concede that what goes on in private between consenting adults is no business of the state. Even those of us for whom homosexual behavior is abhorrent generally agree that the gay subculture should be free to carry on without fear of harassment from the police or from the vigilantes of the straight world. As a society, we distinguish better than we used to between that which we consider sinful or unnatural and that which we brand as criminal. (For a sympathetic understanding of the gay world, we recommend to our readers John Steven Paul's Theatre column elsewhere in this issue.)

But all this is no longer what the gay rights movement considers itself to be about. It has long since gone beyond claiming the right to be let alone. It now demands legitimacy—not just in the eyes of the law, but in moral and cultural terms as well. When homosexual groups denounce "homophobia," they have in mind not simply that habit of mind virulently anti-gay or unwilling to do away with restrictions on gays in employment, housing, and other public goods; they mean any pattern of thought that will not accept homosexuality as an expression of sexual orientation no less legitimate or normal than heterosexuality. Yesterday's gays asked not to be interfered with or made to suffer damages for their private behavior; today's demand public acceptance of their homosexual preferences.

Consider, to begin with, the case of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, a church body whose ecclesiological organizing principle is homosexuality. The UFMCC, which claims to have 109,000 members, has precipitated a crisis of conscience among liberal church people by applying for membership in the National Council of Churches. The NCC is currently pondering whether it can accept into membership a church that affirms sexual relations between people of the same sex as a gift of God and that insists that there is no incompatibility between a homosexual "lifestyle" and the Christian faith. (The NCC has postponed any decision until November, 1983 at the earliest; it appears to be torn between what it instinctively wants to do and what prudence warns that it ought to do.)

The UFMCC is an extreme but not unique phenomenon. Most major denominations—Lutherans and Roman Catholics included—now contain within their ranks organized groups of homosexuals whose purpose is to persuade their various churches to remove their strictures against homosexual behavior and to acknowledge the legitimacy of gay relationships and practices. Gay Christians dismiss traditional church prohibitions and condemnations of homosexual behavior as instances of "bigotry" and "intolerance" that need to be repented of and replaced by a more accepting and inclusive sexual ethic.

As in the religious world, so also in secular matters. For some time now, gays in various communities, notably San Francisco (where homosexuals make up an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of the population) have argued that sex education in the schools must include discussion of homosexual practices in such a way as to present them as an equally valid and entirely normal alternative to heterosexual relationships. More recently, gays have been pressing for recognition of homosexual "family rights." San Francisco again is in the vanguard. The city board of supervisors there recently approved a measure that would grant gay partners of city employees the same benefits that apply to heterosexual spouses of city workers. In order to qualify for benefits—health care being the most significant—couples not related by blood or marriage need simply pay a fee and swear that they "share the common necessaries of life." The measure applies to unmarried heterosexuals as well as gays, but everyone concedes that the impetus for the idea came from the gay community. The precise issue here is legal, but it is obvious that passage of such a measure implies social and moral legitimacy as well as conferral of rights under the law. Gay coupling becomes no more problematic, and no more to be remarked at, than heterosexual union.

If it is true that the tendency to homosexuality lies outside the realm of choice, Christians can hardly attach moral condemnation to it. People cannot be blamed for what they cannot help.

For Christians, the homosexual problem is at once simple and complex. On the one hand, the moral issue could hardly be more straightforward: both the biblical witness and the teaching tradition of the church unequivocally depict homosexual behavior as an abomination. Some apologists for homosexuality have engaged in tortured reinterpretations of scripture and tradition in order to make them say something other than what they do, but those exercises can only be persuasive to those who take neither scripture nor tradition seriously.

Even for those unimpressed with the orthodox tradition, it must be difficult to see homosexual behavior as anything other than a denial of the created order. If there is anything in human practice that would, in the light of nature, belong to the category of the unnatural, it is sexual relations between members of the same sex. Only those who would deny any pattern or coherence in creation could avoid the inference that homosexuality contradicts the natural order of things. It is no coincidence that radical feminists (those who dream of an androgynous social order) have lent support to the gay revolution: both groups have an unresolvable quarrel with nature over their sexual identities.

But if Christians need not agonize endlessly over the moral nature of homosexual behavior, that is only the beginning of their necessary grappling with the problem. Important distinctions and qualifications remain to be made. There is, in the first instance, the crucial difference between inclination and practice. We still lack definitive knowledge of the causes of homosexuality. Some locate it in genetic predisposition, some in psychological reactions to events and relationships in childhood development, some in an uncertain combination of nature and nurture. The gay phenomenon is still hedged about with a good deal of mystery. Whatever the precise reasons for the condition, it seems clear that certain people have a "natural" tendency to an "unnatural" attraction. (Gay rights activists, of course, deny that there is anything contrary to nature or the will of God in homosexual behavior; for them there is no gay "problem" requiring solution, except in the straight world's inability to accept gay preferences.)

If it is true that the tendency to homosexuality lies outside the realm of choice, Christians can hardly attach moral condemnation to it. People cannot be blamed for what they cannot help. Indeed, homosexuals should have our deepest sympathy and compassion, for their unwilled inclination to wrongful behavior means that they must, if they would remain faithful to the Judaeo-Christian sexual ethic, resign themselves to a celibate existence. That is a heavy price to have to pay for what must seem to gay Christians and Jews a cruel jest of God. Those of us in the Christian community who are not gay owe those who are our understanding rather than our censure, and if we must continue to reject homosexual behavior without qualification, we must also learn to accept without reserve our brothers and sisters in Christ for whom heterosexual relations may never be possible.

And when those who are gay succumb to sexual temptation, we must struggle not to make more of that sin than it deserves. Attempts to arrange sins in rank order or to weigh them according to relative gravity ought normally to be avoided (would three instances of sloth outweigh two of gluttony?), but it does seem that our condemnation of homosexual behavior—as with our condemnation of most sexual misdeeds—is often out of proportion to the seriousness of the offense. What the fashionable world makes too little of, Christians often make too much of. Christians should not turn a blind eye to homosexual sin, but neither should they become unduly preoccupied with it. Flagrant indulgence in homosexual behavior, of course, should no more be ignored or played down than should sexual promiscuity of any kind. (It might be noted in this connection that while promiscuity is hardly reserved to gays, it does occur in the gay sub-culture with such frequency as virtually to make it a norm there. There is reason, in other words, to find the world of gay bars and health clubs morally objectionable quite aside from the particular nature of the sexual offenses that occur within it.)

If for Christians the moral dimensions of the homosexual question contain certain ambiguities, those are only compounded when we move to the realm of social norms and public policy. It is not possible in a pluralistic society for Christians to write all their moral preferences into the penal code. Even if it were possible, it would not be desirable. Christians understand adultery, for example, to be a violation of the law of God, but few of us would want to return to the situation where it also constituted a violation of the laws of the state. And whatever it might do to elevate the moral tone of our society, most of us are not inclined to want to reinstate laws requiring sabbath observance. If every sin were to be made a crime, our judicial system would at once collapse under the overload. It therefore does not necessarily follow that Christians will want to see their moral rejection of homosexuality embodied in sodomy laws. As already noted, private behavior affecting only those indulging in it should normally remain a private matter.

But it is precisely here that things get most complicated. What the rhetoric over gay rights so often obscures is that the private rights of homosexuals have never been under threat less than they are today. Only a handful of ineffectual zealots wants to regulate anyone's private morals or to smoke out gays in order to persecute or discriminate against them in jobs, housing, education, or anything else. Few Americans desire

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either to interfere in gays' private sexual activities or to subject them to intrusive interrogations into their sexual preferences in order to deprive them of public benefits. American society today in effect offers gays a tacit agreement: keep your homosexual activities private and discreet and you will be left alone. We may not approve of your behavior but we will ignore it if you do not make a public issue of it.

But for advocates of gay pride that agreement, which in the days of intense anti-homosexual discrimination would have been welcomed, is no longer acceptable. A generation of liberation movements and a revolution in sexual morality have combined to bring gays storming out of the closet in insistent pursuit of overt public acceptance of homosexual behavior. Their demand is not for the rights of privacy but for explicit acknowledgement of their social and moral legitimacy. No one talks any more, except in nostalgia, of the love that dare not speak its name.

Thus the emergence in recent years of gay rights as a public issue stems not from any recrudescence of gay-baiting but from a newly militant mood among gays which insists that society accept them on their own terms *and that the powers of the state be used to guarantee that acceptance*. Gay rights proposals typically call for a flat prohibition against distinctions among persons on the basis of sexual preference. Under the standard gay rights ordinance, for example, no individual may refuse to hire a homosexual otherwise qualified for a position regardless of how flagrant or unrestrained the gay's flaunting of his sexual propensities. Note that such a provision goes beyond protecting from persecution by fanatical anti-homosexuals gays who keep their sexual proclivities private: that could be accomplished simply by forbidding inquiries into sexual preference except in situations where such inquiries could be shown to be relevant (and those rules could be drawn quite strictly).

There is, we concede, a legitimate case to be made on grounds of individual rights for the more inclusive prohibition. What holds some of us back from unqualified support for that position is the moral logic it suggests. Civil rights laws involving racial and ethnic minorities rest on moral imperatives: it is right and necessary for government to protect minorities because discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity has no moral justification. That reasoning does not necessarily apply to the case of gay rights. It is at least arguable that such disputes over social norms should be determined by the free play of public attitudes, and not by the imposition of government proscriptions. (First Amendment safeguards would of course protect advocacy of gay rights under any circumstances, but that is not here under dispute.)

However we finally decide these matters of public policy—and they are anything but simple to sort out—it is necessary to maintain certain distinctions. Civilized existence in a pluralistic society requires a spirit of live-and-let-live; tolerance of deviant behavior is necessary if we are to live together in a state short of perpetual civil war. But tolerance loses any claim to virtue if it becomes defined as the absence of moral judgment or choice. Tolerance is a proximate, not ultimate value, and it should never be elevated higher than it deserves or used as an excuse for moral evasion.

Simple humanity requires that we treat gays with dignity and compassion; there can be no justification for demeaning them as human beings. But that does not mean that we must acknowledge their claims of legitimacy for homosexual practices and relationships. (A friend, unfailingly liberal in all matters, once confessed that she could only remain truly liberal on gay rights if she did not think too carefully about what it was that homosexuals did.) For Christians, permissible sexual relationships must remain conformed to the intentions of the Creator, and the compelling image in the creation story of man and woman become one flesh remains our normative guide. It may not be our place to impose that norm on society, but it must remain the standard by which our moral judgments on this vexed topic stay fixed.

where foxes sleep

deep inside the burrows
the foxes dream grey cold
dreams
their pointed faces
stare straight ahead
their tipped ears
hear the snow banking
on their den

they do not see the light
from our windows
or smell wood smoke
the foxes sleep cold
and deep in snow
their eyes fixed on some silent sign

the wind shakes the house
branches scrape against the window
where our eyes stare back
from a blue-white land
where foxes sleep

J. T. Ledbetter

Life as Gift and Task

Critical Reflections on the Nuclear Dilemma

Steven Schroeder

(Editor's Note: In November, 1982, The Cresset *published Gilbert C. Meilaender, Jr.'s, "Christians and the Nuclear Dilemma: An Unfashionable View." Given the critical and highly controversial nature of this topic, we are pleased to present Mr. Schroeder's essay, which approaches the subject from a quite different perspective.)*

Since July 16, 1945, when the first atomic bomb was detonated near Alamogordo, New Mexico, humankind has lived with nuclear weapons, and we have lived with a growing sense of uniqueness, a sense that ours is a time in which the fate of the earth, our fate, will be decided. The explosion of the international anti-nuclear movement, the popularity of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth,* and a vantage point less than twenty miles from Pantex—the final assembly point for nuclear weapons produced in the United States—make this an appropriate time and place for reflection on the ethical significance of the nuclear arms race.

I take Schell's work, which is a masterful compilation of probable consequences of nuclear war and reflections on the rationality of continued preparation for it, as a point of departure. Like most masterful compilations, it raises questions that it simply cannot address adequately at the same time that it provides a vantage point from which to explore those questions in new and almost certainly more effective ways. I take the explosion of the anti-nuclear movement both as a sign of hope and as an opportunity for political transformation that is unquestionably significant from a theological and ethical perspective. And I take the proximity of Pantex as a shadow under which all of us live and work, a shadow that all of us have had a hand in creating and perpetuating.

The growing sense of uniqueness eloquently expounded by Schell and increasingly felt by people in the peace movement carries a conviction of chosenness or vocation that sets this generation apart from others. That conviction is a mixed blessing, one that inspires us even as it threatens to direct our attention away from the heart of the problem at hand. The most immediate danger is that we will become so convinced of our uniqueness that we will miss some obvious and important lessons from the past.

It is significant, I think, that the first nuclear explosion, code-named Trinity, took place in a desert plain called *Jornada del Muerto,* the Journey of Death. That explosion, which set the current age of nuclear weaponry in motion, took place within a journey of death recognized by Spanish settlers centuries before; it was part of the same journey. Trinity does not so much pose a new problem as it poses an ancient problem, a problem as old as humankind, in a new way.

This is not to dismiss Einstein's observation that, with the advent of nuclear weapons, everything changed except our way of thinking. Einstein was well aware of the fact that the model of a truly radical "scientific" revolution is the Copernican revolution, in which—while the physical universe did not change—the whole world was made new by a new way of seeing. Nothing changed except our way of thinking: the sun and the earth continued to act as they always had, but we saw them with new eyes, and they have never been the same. Einstein's point, I think, was that because our way of thinking remained the same after Hiroshima, nothing changed. At Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we confronted a choice we always confront, and, as always, we chose violence, destruction, and death.

The real revolution would have been to choose life. As Schell makes clear, we are again confronted with that choice in the madness of the nuclear arms race.

It is unfortunate that Schell draws too sharp a distinction between science and philosophy. He contrasts the inexorable progress of science with the continual circling back of philosophy. Science, he says, moves forward while philosophy continually asks the same questions. But the question posed by the unleashing of nuclear power is the same question posed over and over again by philosophy and theology. The question takes the form of death, and the philosophical enterprise takes the form, as Montaigne tells us, of learning to die.

Schell almost inadvertently intertwines the search for knowledge and the confrontation with death. In that, he follows Montaigne and others, including the author of one of the creation accounts in Genesis. His mistake, I think, lies in his failure to acknowledge the conscious and explicit connection. Einstein stands in the tradition of philosophers just as surely as he stands in any independent "scientific" tradition, and his new way of look-

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Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the logical consequences of war. War did not become absurd or irrational with the advent of nuclear weapons; it has always been absurd and irrational.

ing at the universe revolutionizes philosophy just as surely as it revolutionizes physics. As a matter of fact, Einstein joined Russell and others in recognizing that the revolution in science is not a revolution at all until it is a revolution in philosophy and human consciousness.

The ancient problem posed again at Trinity is the problem of the Fall. In that event, according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, sin and death entered the world and became ineradicable parts of human existence. Schell recognizes in part the significance of the fact that death entered the world anew with the advent of the nuclear age. Oppenheimer recognized it more fully when he said that, at Trinity, scientists had tasted of sin. The "second death" Schell discusses at length is another version of the Fall. The elemental power of the universe, which, as a creation of God, is "good," has been turned to evil by humankind's seizure of a power that does not rightly belong to it. Such power, of course, is not power at all, but violence, which, as Schell shows, is finally impotence.

Schell would have us distinguish sharply between "death" as the death of individuals and "extinction" as the death of humanity. This, I think, is a mistake. Schell's definition of extinction as a human future that can never become a human present applies just as well to death. One cannot experience one's death except in imagination, yet, since the Fall, death permeates all of life. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, like Auschwitz and Dachau, reaffirm this with an urgency that should stir us to action. We cannot remove the possibility of death from life, but we can confront it in ways that make our life more fully human.

Some of these ways have been explored by theologians and philosophers in the "pre-nuclear" world. This is not to deny the significance of our recent experience, but I think it important to see the change as part of a progression toward "total war," to borrow Bonhoeffer's term, rather than as a change that entered suddenly and full blown into the world with the first nuclear explosion.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the madness of the nuclear arms race, are the logical—albeit extreme—consequences of war. War did not become absurd or irrational with the advent of nuclear weapons; it has always been absurd and irrational. Before Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we may have been able to survive such insanity, but Hiroshima and Nagasaki are themselves evidence that the survival was only temporary. Our insanity has driven us unswervingly toward destruction.

In his lectures on the Fall, written early in the madness of Hitler's Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes our situation "in the middle." We must keep in mind, he tells us, that we hear of the beginning only in the middle; we cannot step out of the middle and stand in the beginning ourselves except by a lie. The same is true of the end. We view both the beginning and the end from the middle, from within history. This is true for Bonhoeffer even though he says that the Church speaks from the end: "Within the old world the Church speaks of the new world. . . . The old world cannot take pleasure in the Church because the Church speaks of its end as though it had already happened—as though the world had already been judged. The old world does not like being regarded as dead." Yet that is exactly how we must regard it if we are to survive.

Schell would have us take the perspective of future generations as we seek to avert the End. Bonhoeffer would have us take the human perspective of beings in history as we assert that the end has already happened.

Bonhoeffer's description of our perspective is important for at least two reasons. First, it forces us to acknowledge that nuclear war is not just a threat; it is part of a reality that is already killing us. Schell recognizes some of the psychological symptoms of this slow death; he doesn't mention the economic symptoms, the hunger and suffering of those who have no access to the fruit of the earth because that fruit is being expended in the process of the earth's destruction. T.S. Eliot may have been more correct than Schell thinks when he said that the earth will end not with a bang but a whimper. It is entirely possible that no one will push the button; we may simply starve ourselves to death by squandering our resources in arms production.

Second, it keeps us squarely in history as critics of a system and a world that is already dead. Paulo Freire describes this as denunciation of an old order in the active annunciation of a new one. We must exercise caution in attempting to take the perspective of future generations. Even if there are to be no future generations, our task is the same. We must build a truly human present for its own sake, for the sake of being truly human. Sartre was correct, I think, in asserting that it would make no difference if there were no God and no heaven; our task is to live a truly human life now. Bonhoeffer was correct in seeing this as the significance of God's entrance into time and death. The same is true of future generations. Our obligation is to choose a truly human existence regardless of the existence or nonexistence of those generations.

Bonhoeffer also speaks of the knowledge of good and evil standing in the middle. It is accompanied by a prohibition and the threat of death if that prohibition is disobeyed. But for Adam, living in unbroken obedience to the Creator, the threat of death is meaningless. In the words "death," "good," and "evil," God confronts Adam and "points out his limit." Adam experiences this as grace. The limit of human beings is "in the middle," not "on the edge." Bonhoeffer tells us that "in the knowl-

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edge of the limit on the edge there is constantly given the possibility of an inner boundlessness. In the knowledge of the limit in the middle all existence . . . is limited."

Bonhoeffer stresses our finitude and our creatureliness. In the Fall and in Trinity, we failed to acknowledge both. We experienced limits as boundaries or restraints against which to struggle rather than as grace upon which to build. And in pushing against those restraints, we became, as the serpent promised, like gods. Robert Oppenheimer quoted Krishna's statement from the *Bhagavadgita* to describe his experience of Trinity: "Lo, I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds." In becoming gods, we too have become death. Bonhoeffer suggests that a transformation of consciousness, an experience of grace that enables us to live more fully human lives is the way out of that Fallenness. He, of course, finds that experience in Redemption, God's entrance into history. It is not too farfetched to expect that we may find it in a similar way, in Freire's annunciation in the midst of denunciation.

One of the important ways in which this happens is through art. Schell joins Christopher Lasch in dismissing much of contemporary art as mere "spectacle." Schell speaks of it as having dispensed with the common world. But the best of contemporary art has not "dispensed" with the common world so much as it has come to the realization that the common world is no longer "given." More exactly, it has set out to bring us to the realization that this "common world" has *never* been "given." We have always played a role in creating it: recent developments may have brought this role to consciousness. In that regard, at least, these are constructive developments. Wallace Stevens captures the experience of these developments in "Of Modern Poetry":

> The poem of the mind in the act of finding
> What will suffice. It has not always had
> To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
> Was in the script.
> Then the theatre was changed
> To something else. Its past was a souvenir.
> It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
> It has to face the men of the time and to meet
> The women of the time. It has to think about war
> And it has to find what will suffice. It has
> To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage
> And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
> With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
> In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
> Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
> Of which, an invisible audience listens,
> Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
> In an emotion as of two people, as of two
> Emotions becoming one. The actor is
> A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
> An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
> Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
> Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
> Beyond which it has no will to rise.
> It must
> Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
> Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
> Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

Our task is not so simple as merely acting a part. We must also write the play, construct the stage, and be the audience. That is conscious creation of the "common world" that binds us together.

We have always been mythmakers, makers of meaning; we must become more conscious of that role if we are to survive. Where we have failed to become conscious, we experience what Schell fears: loss of meaning and a radical break with the past. But in a very real sense, that perceived break precedes nuclear war as its cause rather than following it as an effect.

We are so panic stricken by the prospect of a future that is not "given" that we lose sight of the fact that the future has never been simply given. Life is a gift, no doubt, but it is also a task. We are creatures, but we are also creators, created in the image of God.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that our panic creates the illusion that our present is "given" and immutable. It isn't. We construct our world in our creative action. When we begin to perceive that world simply as given, we begin to become less human.

Schell's most distressing mistake, I think, is the assertion that "the law of fear" and "the law of love" lead to the same thing. To believe that would be a fatal error. The author of John's first epistle was correct, I think, in saying that "perfect love casts out fear." The "law of love" will help us announce a new order in the midst of this madness. The "law of fear" will only lead us on toward final destruction.

Living "the law of fear" in this madness *is* a final destruction. It is literally the experience of hell in the denial of humanity, in humanity's self-important denial of itself.

Perfectly sane people, people who are our brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, friends and neighbors, go to Pantex every day and assemble three or more nuclear warheads to add to our arsenal. They go out of a sense of duty, a sense of patriotism, a feeling of economic necessity. All these things are grounded in fear, fear of the Soviets, fear of diminished military prowess, fear of a diminishing standard of living. That fear distorts the love of country, the love of freedom, the love of family to a point at which they come to produce the destruction of all.

If we accomplish nothing else, we must move from fear to love, and we must do it in history, for the sake of humanity—not the future of humanity, but its present. We must accomplish that even if we are the last generation and even if our grandchildren will never be born.

Luther and the Fundamental Religious Experience

James Atkinson

In order to understand Martin Luther, one must above all understand his overwhelming experience of God reconciling man to Himself through the Gospel of Christ, whereby Luther found peace with God and a total explanation of this life and the certainty of joyous life with God forever. Luther wagered his all on God, and would not be silenced, unless proved wrong or shown to be wrong. If modern man could but begin to understand Luther's faith, a faith which throws itself upon God, in life and in death, he would begin to understand Luther's significance for Christendom.

Luther never argued this, neither did he seek to prove it on intellectual grounds: he simply proclaimed it. This is the way of all such charismatic leaders. They all have the prophetic gift of spiritual insight and vision, by which they see and experience God, as well as the gift of warm, compelling speech to communicate what they have seen, felt, heard, and known. In some faint and far-off way they all possess the insight and manner of Jesus.

This way of knowing is not unrelated to the new approach of the scientist in the post-Einstein period. Newton and Descartes were analytical, i.e., they *separated* themselves from the phenomena they examined, and they observed, described, and related those aspects of nature which they had separated out for closer study. This process seemed necessary, and it yielded valid conclusions. Since Einstein, however, it is becoming clearer that reality must be seen as a whole, and all of it organically related, none of it static but always dynamic: it must be integrated. In other words, the scientist is no longer an *observer,* but rather *participant* in the phenomena he observes and seeks to interpret. This is very close to what Luther meant when he spoke of the experience of faith, still closer to what St. John meant when he spoke of revelation.

When Luther spoke of faith he was not explaining Christian doctrine in objective terms, or giving a reasonable and impartial account of Christian faith and morals. This he could well do when the occasion demanded it. No. He had been taken hold of by God and his life was now hid with Christ in God. What he was now talking about was not doctrine or morals on the lines of a medieval schoolman observing such phenomena: he was now a partaker in God and a participant in the life which God intended for man, which He had revealed in Jesus Christ and was now sustaining by the Spirit of Truth. This was the way things were: this was the explanation of the mystery of existence.

In some small way Luther was experiencing a glimpse of the mind of God, if that is not too much to say. Faith was the compelling power of God, given by God, and it enabled Luther to see the divine meaning and purpose of life, as it had been revealed in Christ. He saw all phenomena of time and space under God as a whole, himself a partaker and prophetic exponent. In other words, as St. John explains it, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, which comes and makes His abode with a man, and which guides into all truth. It was such an experience, the very gift of God Himself, which Luther meant by faith. This is no confessional or Lutheran emphasis: it is the very heartbeat of Christianity.

Melanchthon, in a preface to Luther's works, described how Luther had always insisted on the distinction "between philosophy and the gospel, something which is not in fact present in Scotus, Thomas, and their fellows." By "philosophy" Melanchthon meant logical ratiocination, purely speculative thinking, carried through in a detached, objective frame of mind: to study with disinterest, as if the conclusions did not affect us. "Gospel," on the other hand, *being an activity of God,* is inaccessible to human reason, often contrary thereto, and requires personal involvement and commitment of the kind Luther exemplified in order to understand it. One of Luther's great objections to his scholarly predecessors, "Sophists" as he was wont to call them, was what he called a lack of "sincerity," in that they treated "rationally" those truths which are revealed to passion alone, i.e., to one committed, to one involved. Luther always considered that Erasmus embodied this very "superficiality" or "insincerity," which "thinks of the Christian religion as a comedy or tragedy. It contains

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no real events, but fictions conceived to teach good behavior."[1] Luther simply said, "He is not committed." He asked, "How can you deal with people who have no firm belief to which you might appeal? You cannot refute them by scripture for it does not mean anything to them."[2]

It is of great interest to the thesis of the present essay to recall that what Luther called "sincerity" is precisely that quality of his mind which separated him from many churchmen of his day, and which continues to the present day to be unacceptable to Roman Catholics who may admire him, and who freely recognize the abuses of the Church which he opposed and corrected. Those abuses, they concede, needed to be reformed: they were in fact reformed. They are all dead and gone. It is the author's experience that the modern, educated, ecumenically-minded Catholic agrees with Catholic moderates like Cardinal Contarini, and is generally of the opinion that the schism was both unfortunate and unnecessary. Luther, on the other hand, said repeatedly that the issue was not about scandals and abuses, but about doctrine, "*propter Deum.*" Even the distinguished Catholic church historian, Joseph Lortz, who more than any other man brought Luther out of the ghetto where the Catholics had banished him into the light of open and free examination, described this as Luther's "subjectivism." Lortz could not reconcile subjectivism with the Catholic Church. He argued that Luther was subconsciously arguing on the false assumption that the transformation in us, whereby we are justified, must be experienced with such immediacy and emotion as to produce absolute certainty.

Here is a fundamental disagreement, a disagreement which twentieth-century man can state in terms he can understand and accept. Shall priority be given to intellectual understanding, or to subjective experience? Properly understood, however, these should not be seen as alternatives, or as mutually exclusive; rather, when a man is taken hold of by God, he then learns the truth of his real nature as a man, and his place in the world in God's plan and purpose. This experience, described as "being taken hold of by God," refers to a divine activity, and is not, or rather is much more than, an intellectual conviction which has been arrived at by normal intellectual activity.

A person who has undergone such an experience does arrive at a perfectly sound intellectual position, in that it provides an explanation of his state of being which gives a satisfactory and complete interpretation of the mystery of his human existence. It is an intellectual position as much as the agnostic or even the atheist occupies, open to all the criticisms such people make, and with the intellectual responsibility not only of meeting the objections of such, but of expressing its ultimate position in terms they understand. What is being argued here is that while the man of faith may hold a sound intellectual position, that position is not arrivable at by intellect alone, in the way one proves a theorem of Euclid or works out the distance from the earth of a star. In other words, *it is created by God not fashioned by man.*

The experience Jesus underwent, through the long testing years of the wilderness and wrestling with God, is the perfect paradigm of what is being discussed here. Lesser men, such as the Apostles, all shared this activity in some way. Men described it as, "they had been with Jesus." Charismatic leaders, such as St. Francis or Luther, all share in some small way this kind of experience and the authority that goes with it. It would cast a great deal of light on our understanding of Luther to take a brief look at this experience as portrayed by Jesus Christ.

The Invincible Lordship of Christ

In the Gospel narratives Jesus comes before men with complete assurance and resolute authority. He is no trained Rabbi, yet He challenges the scribes to combat as if He needed neither institutional training nor public position to support Him. He speaks with authority and silences all who oppose Him on their own grounds. He appears as sovereign over all authorities which stand in His way. This invincible Lordship over every person and situation is the expression of His mysterious nature and power, and evokes astonishment and awe, enthusiasm or terror, as appropriate in each situation.

When Christ strode across the stage of history, claiming to be far more than prophet or sage, showing that He was God's last Word in the redemption of man, saying that all men had need of Him and that He alone could save and redeem, He set forth His claims in a manner unique among all founders of religions. He made His claims calmly and deliberately, as a matter of course. He never explained Himself. He never reasoned His position. He simply announced it, and let conviction steal into the hearts and minds of His followers as they heard His unique words and witnessed His unique deeds. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This was always His manner. He never deigned to explain mysteries the curiosity of His disciples would fain penetrate. He simply took for granted many things modern men would long to discuss. His sayings proceeded from One who was in perpetual communion with God, and therefore were uttered with a breath-taking authority, quietly and assuredly, nothing doubting, completely confident that they carried their own self-

[1] *WA TR* 2, 346, 17-19. (References are given to the Weimar edition of Luther's works, *WA*, and where possible to the American edition, *AE.*)

[2] *WA TR* 5, 183, 27.

For Luther, the true reading of the Bible is a continuous process of perpetually bringing faith to birth: it is a constant renewal and re-creation of the spiritual understanding.

authenticating power and conviction.

It is important at this point to distinguish sharply between what the New Testament describes as the work of the Holy Spirit and what generally might be called Illuminism or Inspiration. Luther in his biblical exegesis distinguished between the spirit and the letter, but to draw this distinction clearly the guidance of the Holy Spirit himself was necessary,

> . . . for nobody understands these precepts unless it is given him from above. . . . Therefore, they most sadly err who presume to interpret the Holy Scriptures and the law of God by taking hold of them by their own understanding and study.[3]

The words, ideas, phrases of Scripture will not of themselves bring enlightenment and inward comprehension, for what is uttered *vocaliter* needs to be understood *vitaliter,* in the heart and conscience. Luther argued that the Holy Spirit is hidden in the letter of Scripture, since the letter itself may proclaim only the Law, or the Wrath of God, whereas the Holy Spirit conveys the word of grace, the gospel.

This means, and this is a most happy and creative consequence, that the interpretation of scripture is not something that is settled once for all, as a fixed body of belief, or a received tradition. On the contrary, it is a task that each and every man must assume for himself, if the knowledge of the Word is not to sink once again to the level of a dogmatic literalism. The true reading of the Bible is a continuous process of perpetually bringing faith to birth: it is a constant renewal and re-creation of the spiritual understanding. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:14).

Nevertheless, in stressing that such truth came only from the Holy Spirit, Luther was acutely aware of the dangers of the kind of Illuminism which the left wing radicals and enthusiasts were energetically seeking to project onto the Reformation. He repudiated vigorously their claims to possess the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, claims which, in his view, led to pride, fanaticism, intolerance, and division. He emphasized the historical, objective witness of the divine revelation: it was the Holy Spirit who unfolded its meaning to the penitent and believing heart.

St. Paul had a similar experience and carried a similar power of authority. His writings contain more theology than all the writings of all the Fathers, but his authority lay in that it pleased God who had separated him from the womb (cf. Jeremiah) to call him by grace, to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach Him among the heathen. His authoritative theology derived from his religious experience. Such a calling, such authority he deigned not to confirm by any human authority. He lived unto God, yet, as he put it in Galatians, it was no longer Paul who lived but Christ who lived in him, and the new life he now lived was by faith in the Son of God.

So also it was with Athanasius. The place of Athanasius as a great religious leader has been overshadowed by his immense theological and biblical learning which ousted Arianism and paganism. It is as a theologian that history remembers him in his fight for the Nicene orthodoxy, but first and foremost he was a man of the most profound religious experience of Christ. His theology was the outcrop of his religion. His inner fortress was his spiritual intuition: he *knew* that *his* Savior and Redeemer was the God who made heaven and earth. It was less his intellect than his unflinching and invincible faith that convinced his day and generation. We should ever recall that it was his spiritual strength that gave that powerful personality such moral and mental vigor, so that he was loved and respected even among the heathen. Loyal to friends, generous to foes, he won everybody by his irrepressible humor. In all his long years of exile and banishment, hounded by the state police, he was never once betrayed. Gregory and Epiphanius, Augustine and Cyril, Luther and Hooker, not to mention moderns, all pay tribute to this saint. Even Gibbon laid aside his "solemn sneer" to do homage to Athanasius the Great. But it was his spiritual experience of the Living Christ that was the fountain head of that brilliant and irrefutable theology.

Strength from Communion with Christ

So it was with Augustine, Bernard, and Francis, with Bunyan and Wesley, indeed with every great leader of the Christian people. In every case, the leader's strength, whether of knowledge, or conviction, or sympathy, has always come from a direct communion with Christ, an experience he has felt and known by himself and communicated to others in language grasped by them and in deeds recognized by them as having the authentic touch of Christ. All such men have experienced that strange warming of the heart, that penetrating the mists of doubt and uncertainty: and all who knew them and experienced their ministry knew that it had pleased God to reveal Christ in them; all who knew them echo the words of the blind man healed by Christ, One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

It was not otherwise with Luther and with the Reformation of which he was the leader. The power behind Luther was the shattering spiritual experience that reshaped him completely. When God touched Luther, so that he realized that there was no thought he could

[3] *WA* 57, 185,20—186,9; *AE* 29, 186.

The beginnings of the Reformation were experiential, not doctrinal. In fact it could be argued that it was Luther's experience that opened up to him the Bible, church history, and doctrine.

create, no prayer he could offer, no deed he could perform which would bridge the painful gap between himself and God, but that God Himself had come all the way in Christ, he said,

> When I had realized this I felt myself absolutely born again. The gates of paradise had been flung open and I had entered. There and then the whole of scripture took on [a new] look to me. . . .[4]

It was the old experience of all the saints, and yet it was new, for in it was the creative power of God. There was nothing new in Luther's experience, but as it was of God, it made everything new. He *knew* that his life was hid with Christ in God in spite of all evil, in spite of sin, in spite of guilt. All his old dread of God, all his fears and anxieties, all his doubts and uncertainties vanished like the morning mist, and in their place arose a buoyant and glad-hearted love of God, in answer to the love which was kindled by the experience of what God had revealed in Christ. This Luther experienced with a compelling certainty, and this he proclaimed from pulpit, lectern, and desk. It had pleased God to reveal His Son in him, and this experience, and its proclamation in spoken and written word, was the sole foundation on which the Reformation was built. From this experience in Christ all Luther's theology derived: one could even have the religious experience without the theology to explain it.

Intellectual Speculation vs. Theology

The beginnings of the Reformation were experiential, not doctrinal. In fact it could be argued that it was Luther's experience that opened up to him the Bible, church history, and doctrine. He now saw what the Bible was about and what God had done of pure love in Christ for us men and our salvation. This vision opened up the whole field of church history to him like a panorama from a mountain top. It was this experience that made him acutely aware of all the innovations and accretions which had grown up over the centuries: transubstantiation, infallibility, monasticism, indulgences, Mariolatry. It was this experience which made him see that the theology of his day, the scholastic philosophy, was but an intellectual speculation on the nature of God and His attributes and was no theology at all: it certainly was not about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The outcome of such intellectualism, apart from its benefits of mental gymnastics, was to create an idol, a figment of the human mind.

Doctrines, and their formal expression in theology, are not the beginnings of things. They are formulations, or even warehouses, where are stored centuries-old experience of the one thing needful. There is always at the basis of knowledge, whether of men or things, some sensitive and delicate relationship of personality with personality. Logic and reason help us from making errors, but vision, growth, development, and insight are fired when soul meets soul and shares the truth of experience. This is true of scientific inquiry and of aesthetic and artistic growth: how much more true it is of religion. We must be in touch with God to know Him in the true sense of knowledge.

At the beginning of any real advance in religion there must be a personal and intimate vision of God impressed upon us as a religious experience which we know to be true because we have felt it. The vision and experience of the one is caught by the other: it is caught not taught. The revival under Francis of Assisi spread in the way it did because the fire burning in his heart kindled a flame in the heart of every man, woman, and child who met him. Luther headed the greatest reformation and revival of all time, because men felt and knew that he had found a gracious God by a total trust in the grace of God revealed to him in Christ Jesus. It was not the Augsburg Confession, neither was it the Lutheran theology which gave us the Reformation; it was the contagion of the religious experience Luther found in Christ. The expansion of that experience finds inadequate expression in any confession or creed. Let us study that experience a little more closely.

It is not to intellectual difficulties or doctrinal uncertainties that the beginnings of Luther's pilgrimage can be traced, though it is true to say that when his religious experience fulfilled itself, it resulted, in those areas where it was accepted, in the collapse of the catholic culture, the breakdown of the catholic hierarchical structure, civil and ecclesiastical, from the local convent to the authority of Rome, and the revision and reconstruction of the catholic doctrinal system. But the cause of that upheaval lay elsewhere.

There is an old proverb that it is doubt that makes a monk. This is true of Luther. There is not the slightest trace of intellectual difficulty about doctrine during Luther's great crisis. He had a brilliant university career in the Faculty of Law, was lively, witty, happy, gifted musically, and well set for a fine career in what we would call the civil service. He gave the world up, he gave his career up, to find one thing only: peace with God. Luther did the only thing he could do, and that was to go into a monastery, the one place on earth where he could give his whole life to save his soul. Almost everyone in Luther's day would agree that that was the one and only course, save, of course, men such as his common-sensed father, or the witty and brilliant Erasmus, long disillusioned with monkery, for he had been through it all.

As Calvin was later to show, the very anthropocentric

[4] *WA* 54, 186, 8-10; *AE* 34, 337.

manner in which Luther expressed his *cri de coeur* showed how wrongly he diagnosed his concern, how hopeless was his quest. He wondered when he would ever do enough, make himself good enough, to reach a gracious God and be found worthy of acceptance. God heard his prayer, but Luther was yet to learn the difference between God *hearing* prayer and God *answering* prayer.

Inside the monastery Luther devoted all his ability with the utmost fervor to use to the uttermost the penitential system in order to make himself fit to be the receptacle of the grace of God. His obedience to his supervisor was absolute and rigorous. He sought the confessional to find peace of mind. He did not doubt the place of the confessional, but when he could not experience the reality of it in his heart he thought that there must be something wrong with him, some inadequacy in his confession. He made full use of the sacraments, and waited in vain for the mysterious, inexplicable experience of the grace he expected to flow from them.

Looking for Christ, Finding the Devil

He turned to all the other well-tried means: private chastisements, fastings, vigils, prayer. He sought not only to propitiate God by doing extra works, but to compel God to remove from his soul the consciousness of guilt. He failed: but it was himself he blamed, not the methods. He persevered, in spite of the feeling of continuous failure. He later said, if ever a monk could have got to heaven by monkery, I could! Surely, someone will ask, had he never heard of the grace of God? We must remember that spiritual and academic teachers alike all taught that a man had to earn grace by doing everything that was in him, "all that in him lay" was the technical expression. This only sharpened Luther's anguish, for how could he ever know that he had done "all that in him lay"? Luther felt an overpowering sense of God's presence, and as a mortal sinner this was felt as a trembling awareness the sinner senses in the presence of God the Holy One. He was like the moth longing for the candle flame about to be destroyed by it. He said of this experience that his confrontation with God was like seeing the Devil: "When I looked for Christ it seemed to me I saw the Devil."

Two long years of such anguish dragged on. His superiors believed him to be a young saint: his fellow monks thought him the perfect monk. In his heart, Luther knew otherwise. He thought that he was wrestling with his own sin: what he was really struggling with was the religion of his times and of his church. He was probing it, testing it, examining it in all its depths, wrestling with the whole church's understanding of grace: what he expected to be sources of comfort, strength, and joy turned out to be springs of terror. Luther was too brilliant, too percipient, too spiritual, above all too deadly earnest, not to see that none of these things was leading him to any solid ground on which he could base his confidence and hopes for this world and for eternity. He was much too honest to allow himself to be persuaded otherwise. When his father confessor said to him that God was not angry with Luther, that it was Luther who was angry with God, he still failed to find assurance. "My confessor once told me after I had submitted foolish things as sins (*stulta peccata*): 'You are foolish; God does not bear you a grudge; you bear Him a grudge. God is not angry with you; you are angry with God.' A fine word which he spoke even before the light of the Gospel shone forth."[5]

It was Luther's work on the Bible which saved him, in particular the discovery of the meaning of justification by faith as given in his exposition of Romans 1:17. As already noted, he was able to say after that discovery that he felt born again, with the gates of Paradise now open to him and the whole of Scripture beginning to take on another look. It was this perspective, the entering in to Paradise, that gave Luther not only the insight to interpret his own desperate spiritual struggle—and this was liberation indeed—but also the immediate and total awareness of the nature of the Gospel: to be set right with God, to live at peace with Him, not by virtue of his own righteousness, but by the sovereign grace of God in Christ reconciling His world to Himself, to be justified by faith.

By faith, he says. What then did Luther mean by faith? To understand this term is not only to grasp the whole significance of the Bible and what God's purpose in Christ is and was, but it is to have the key to the Reformation. To apprehend Luther's experience of faith, to understand Luther's religious experience, is to know in essentials the theology of the Reformation, for the theology is but the doctrinal and intellectual formulation of that experience. To know the theology is not the same thing as to have the experience. One can know the theology and know nothing of the experience: to know the experience is to know both. That is why it is so important to understand what Luther meant by faith.

> It should be noted that there are two ways of believing. One way is to believe *about* God, as I do when I believe that what is said of God is true; just as I do when I believe what is said about the Turk, the devil, or hell. This faith is knowledge or observation rather than faith. The other way is to believe *in* God, as I do when I not only believe that what is said *about* Him is true, but put my trust *in* Him, surrender myself to Him and make bold to deal with Him, believing without doubt that He will be to me and do to me just as what is said of Him.[6]

[5] *WA TR* 1, 47, 21; *AE* 54, 15.

[6] *WA* 7, 215, 1-8.

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indeed all the Reformers, Christ fills the whole sphere of God: they do not recognize any theology which is not a Christology.

When we speak of a faith that throws itself upon God, which wagers its all upon Him, we are not speaking of mere mystical abandonment: certainly Luther never meant this. Faith is the sum total of our very life, as Luther never tired of saying. It actually is *God within us,* welling up in all kinds of activities. Faith receives all from God, and is moved by Him to give its all to its neighbor in love. Faith towards God and love towards my neighbor constitute the great hinge round which all religion and all ethics truly turn.

> Surely, there is no faith where not love but its opposite appears and shows itself. Although the works of love do not justify and save, yet they must follow as fruits and tokens of faith.[13]

This is what came to Luther and ended his long and terrible struggle. He is unwearied in describing it: whether in lecture room or pulpit, in book or letter, even in conversation at table. The descriptions are extremely varied as far as their expressions go: sometimes in medieval scholastic propositional form at a disputation; sometimes with texts from Psalms, Prophets, or New Testament; sometimes in illustrations from the feeding of his little robin on his window sill with the breakfast crumbs, or from his little dog Rascal as he stroked him and rubbed his ears; sometimes in phrases from the medieval mystics; sometimes in his own phrases of startling rugged beauty and originality. Always and always whether to pope or prince, priest or people, the meaning is always the same and always clear.

This conception of what Christianity means, what Christ intended, what the true flavor of the authentic religious experience really is, is the religious soul of the Reformation. It contains within it, in that they naturally issue from it, all the religious principles which inspired it. We should not think of it as a dogma, or as Reformation theology, or even as evangelical theology. It is an experience, it is the one thing needful, and that is why it is of prime importance to see it first in these terms. Nobody knew more theology than the young monk Luther; nobody knew more or practised more devotedly and devoutly his religion. Yet he did not know God.

Luther's experience, the way he expressed it, the way he thought through and beyond the theology and practice of his day finally to be confronted by the stark simplicity and finality of Christ, is what made Luther relevant to all men of his day and what gives him his abiding significance. Grant this thesis, and it will be seen how relevant are the religious principles which issue from that experience, and how disturbing they always are to the religous establishment, Protestant and Catholic alike.

But first and foremost, it is an experience, and the phrases which set it forth are the descriptions of an experience a soul has gone through. The thing itself is beyond description, as all deep experiences are. It must be felt and gone through to be known. The Reformation started from this personal experience of the believing Christian, which it declared to be the one elemental fact in Christianity which could never be proved by argument, nor dissolved by criticism. It proclaimed the great truth, which had been universally neglected throughout the whole period of medieval theology by everyone except the saintly Mystics, that in order to know God, or speak one word of truth and sense about Him, man must be in living touch with God Himself, and God must first have spoken to him. Therein lay all its freshness and appeal, all its originality and power.

Christ As the Center of Scripture

Luther made Christ the Redeemer the center of his writings just as He found Him to be the center of Scripture. Without understanding who and what Christ is, neither Luther nor Scripture can be properly appreciated: Scripture and Luther are foreign ground to all who do not recognize Christ as their Redeemer.

> Note that this is the judgment and punishment which God permits to come upon those who do not see this light, that is, do not accept and believe God's Word concerning Christ and then go about steeped in utter darkness and blindness and no longer know anything whatever of matter divine. They now understand no article of Christian teaching: what sin is, what man's ability is, how one gets rid of sin and becomes righteous, what Law or Gospel is, what faith is, what good works are, what the Christian estates are. And since they do not know Christ, they cannot really know and see a Christian but must condemn and persecute the true Church and Christians, who teach the word of Christ.[14]

Luther rediscovered religion when he declared that the truly Christian man must cling directly and with a living faith to the God who speaks to him in Christ, saying, I am thy salvation. The earlier Reformers never forgot this. Luther proclaimed his discovery, and though a masterly disputant, never attempted to prove it by argument: it was something self-evident—seen and known when experienced. Like his Master Christ, he had the prophetic vision and the magnetic speech to proclaim to others what he had seen, felt, and known. And as in the parable of his Master Christ, when he found the one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

[13] *WA* 45, 691, 16-19; *AE* 24, 252.

[14] *WA* 46, 28, 6-15; *AE* 24, 329.

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Luther made Christ the Redeemer the center of his writings just as He found Him to be the center of Scripture. Without understanding who and what Christ is, neither Luther nor Scripture can be properly appreciated: Scripture and Luther are foreign ground to all who do not recognize Christ as their Redeemer.

> Note that this is the judgment and punishment which God permits to come upon those who do not see this light, that is, do not accept and believe God's Word concerning Christ and then go about steeped in utter darkness and blindness and no longer know anything whatever of matter divine. They now understand no article of Christian teaching: what sin is, what man's ability is, how one gets rid of sin and becomes righteous, what Law or Gospel is, what faith is, what good works are, what the Christian estates are. And since they do not know Christ, they cannot really know and see a Christian but must condemn and persecute the true Church and Christians, who teach the word of Christ.[14]

Luther rediscovered religion when he declared that the truly Christian man must cling directly and with a living faith to the God who speaks to him in Christ, saying, I am thy salvation. The earlier Reformers never forgot this. Luther proclaimed his discovery, and though a masterly disputant, never attempted to prove it by argument: it was something self-evident—seen and known when experienced. Like his Master Christ, he had the prophetic vision and the magnetic speech to proclaim to others what he had seen, felt, and known. And as in the parable of his Master Christ, when he found the one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

[13] *WA* 45, 691, 16-19; *AE* 24, 252.

[14] *WA* 46, 28, 6-15; *AE* 24, 329.

Eloquent Emotions

Men and Women and Tears

Dot Nuechterlein

Since I do not reside in Illinois it is possible that I may never have the opportunity to cast a vote for Jim Thompson, that state's current governor. On the basis of a television appearance by him last November, however, I think I would like to.

Even those of you at a distance are no doubt aware of what happened in the recent election contest between Thompson and his challenger, Adlai Stevenson III. Every one of the advance polls predicted a landslide victory for the incumbent, yet the election turned out to be so close-run a thing that neither side could claim success for several days. (Even at this writing there is an air of uncertainty hanging over the outcome, with the possibility of a full-scale recount looming in the coming months.)

Several days after the voting ended Thompson finally went before the cameras and, guided by unofficial but reasonably conclusive ballot counts, declared himself the winner. I watched that broadcast with fascination, for as he at long last had the opportunity to thank his supporters and workers for their loyalty and labors on his behalf, the man's voice broke and his composure cracked. It was the nearest I have ever seen a major political figure come to crying on camera.

Of course there was a reasonable explanation for this incident. That news conference climaxed what had to have been several days of anxiety and little sleep. A see-saw battle probably always creates hope/fear tensions and self-doubts, along with gnawing reassessments and possible recriminations over past strategies and policy decisions. But to have that experience develop out of previous sure-thing expectations must have been nearly unbearable for the Thompson camp, and we can well understand how the mix of relief and gratitude could bring on a show of emotion.

What impressed me, though, was the Governor's handling of this episode. He did not explain or excuse himself; he was not embarrassed, nor did he try to hide what was happening. He did not stop and "pull himself together" before proceeding. Jim Thompson was a human being acting like one, and he let us in on the vulnerability inherent in the creaturely condition even as he lived it.

Illinois feminists mounted a strong campaign last year to try to oust the Governor because of what they felt was his betrayal of women's rights and his tepid efforts on behalf of the ERA, whose defeat in that state sealed its doom nationwide. I suggest, however, that Thompson's display of feelings may have positive repercussions that in the long run will prove beneficial to the cause of women.

How so? Well, no one in his/her right mind could ever conceive of Big Jim as being weak, or wimpy (a campaign issue associated with Stevenson), or soft, or at all feminine in any way. Yet there he was being unabashedly emotional for all the world to see, and seeming to take it for granted as natural and normal behavior. Would that his example might help to persuade others of the folly of perceiving of males as eternally the cool, dispassionate, rational sex, with females supposedly ever verging on sentimentality or hysteria.

Every child's first act of life is to howl for breath, and males as well as females spend large portions of their first few years weeping and wailing. But in our culture many (most?) boys learn early to repress this tendency to tears. It is such a strong taboo that by adulthood it seems to occur but rarely in public, and then only under extreme provocation or duress. For males, crying is irrational and infrequent, the sign of weakness and lack of control.

Small wonder, then, that the fellow who does break down in public is often thought badly of. (Remember Ed Muskie? Some say he sacrificed his chance to be President when his anger at a slur against his wife took the form of public tears.) And it is therefore no surprise that many men do not quite trust the capability or stability of women, those emotional creatures who are likely to weep in a twinkling.

What these men do not seem to understand is that for women, tears are not necessarily antithetical to self-control. Crying is a multipurpose form of expression: it might signify joy, sadness, anger, fatigue, gratitude, or frustration. *Item:* has there ever been a newly-crowned beauty queen whose dewy eyes did not sparkle as much as her tiara? *Item:* sex therapists indicate that a woman brought to the brink of orgasm but left there unfulfilled is likely to shed involuntary tears (and, by

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In contrast to tears, anger is seldom therapeutic. While a show of temper can sometimes clear the air, it is usually unpleasant and stressful for both the actor and the receiver/observer.

the way, this reaction is likely to be misinterpreted by both her partner and herself). *Item:* weeping over trifles is a not uncommon response to weariness. *Item:* I clearly and painfully recall childhood or teenage instances of being so furious at a brother or a boyfriend that I could do nothing but cry—and then being all the madder because I had no means other than tears to convey that anger.

Even today I tend to get teary rather regularly. When the hero gets the girl, when the orchestra plays a haunting refrain, when a weak one is hurt or exploited, when someone is honored for a special achievement, even when it's a player on the opposing team who hits a home run—count on me to blow my nose and have difficulty in speaking. And other women seem to say the same. (In fact, it is almost as though the older we get the more likely we are to choke up or glaze over.)

Here is the point: crying is so much a part of the female experience that *we can do it and think at the same time.*

This fact is not recognized by the general public. For example, opinion polls show that many citizens object to the idea of having a woman become President of the United States: they fear she might cry at cabinet meetings or in other high level situations. Well, so what? Surely there are circumstances in this world that deserve to be wept over. (Jesus did it, we may recall.) However, it is undoubtedly not the tears per se, but the misconception that one who cries is falling apart, that causes concern.

This is another illustration of how a female who competes in any traditionally male activity is expected to conform to typically male behavior patterns. A recently-published guide for career women, written by a successful businesswoman, recommends that women become "like men" as they move out into the world. She suggests that her sisters must learn to transform their customary emotional responses into anger, because "men can deal with anger."

I disagree with that advice. There is a place in the working world for woman's skill in handling all sorts of emotions. Take my field, college teaching, as an example. It is not at all unusual for a student to come to a professor's office and, upset over a grade or a personal difficulty, to break into tears. Any number of male teachers have told me that this experience makes them feel awkward or uncomfortable, but never have I heard a woman say that. (I am sure that some men don't mind and some women do, but I have not happened to run into them.)

In my opinion, tears can be a great boon in a counseling situation. Often the person trying desperately to keep from crying is concentrating so hard on maintaining control that s/he cannot express or explain the underlying difficulty. Once that tension is broken, real communication and genuine relief become possible. The sufferer who cannot allow himself to reach that state, and the helper whose main concern is to turn off the faucet should the floods begin, are both handicapped in dealing with the problem at hand.

In contrast to tears, anger is seldom intrinsically therapeutic. While a show of temper can sometimes clear the air, it is usually unpleasant and stressful for both the actor and the receiver/observer. Rather than easing the flow of mutual understanding between individuals, anger creates barriers to communication. Perhaps men can "deal with" anger because it is commonly the sole emotional outlet they are permitted to display openly; unfortunately, though, a quiver stocked with poison-tipped arrows alone, while marvelously useful for destruction, is woefully ineffective for amelioration.

No, I do not believe we women who are in public positions should follow the established male patterns. But then, neither should they follow ours. It is simply not true that if women could take charge of the world everything would be love and sunshine. The problems of life are so complex that we must pool the insights and resources of all of us—of both sexes, of all races and nationalities, of all classes and conditions—if peace and

From The Chapel

Lines Composed A Few Miles Below Fountains Abbey

On Revisiting The Question Of Faith And Culture

Richard Lee

We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
Romans 3:28

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.
James 2:24

He who is not with me is against me.
Matthew 12:30a

He that is not against us is for us.
Mark 9:40

Richard Lee *is Associate Professor of Humanities in Christ College of Valparaiso University and Director of the University's Overseas Study Center in Cambridge, England. Fountains Abbey, a Cistercian monastery in North Yorkshire near York, was founded December 27, 1132 and dissolved November 26, 1539. The scenic ruins of the Abbey are presently maintained by a governmental department for the environment and may soon pass to the care of The National Trust.*

If there are sermons in stones and books in running brooks, then our recent visit to the ruins of Fountains Abbey probably spoke a more moving sermon to each of you than anything your preacher can say in chapel today on these more conventional, and apparently contradictory, texts from Paul and James, Matthew and Mark.

For us to travel through field and fountain, moor and mountain to that secluded valley, then stroll up the willowed stream to its spring, past the pool of swans gliding like gauze and the pasture of sheep scattered like foam, finally to ascend the towering foundations of the Abbey antiphonally circled by seagulls, was for many of us so deeply moving an aesthetic experience that to say any more about it is to diminish it. Fountains Abbey is one of the ancient monuments in England where the tourists are reduced to whispering in the open air. Their clicking cameras go quietly blind. Their souvenirs must become themselves. You can scarcely share the experience with one another in the moment, much less gasp it into postcards for the folks back home. You had to be there.

The Sweet Afterglow of the Aesthetic

Now, recollecting that sublime experience in the tranquility of chapel, we probably should be wary of leaving Fountains Abbey in the sweet afterglow of the aesthetic. Truth to tell, the Abbey is more beautiful today as a misty and mossy ruin than ever it was as a working and sweating Christian community, and its present green and pleasant decadence lends it a certain charm and enchantment which the fathers and brothers who built it never intended for it. In some ways those beautiful ruins now obscure their faith as much as they reveal it, and on some windy days I seem to hear the old monks chanting their admonition to us—which, if I translate their Latin aright, comes down to "Too beautiful to be true, too beautiful to be true." You see, they had in mind the beauty of holiness, not the holiness of beauty.

Even more, however, we should also be wary of turning such awesome achievements of faith in former times into some terrible judgment upon our ventures of faith today. There may be a tendency to see so many monuments of medieval Christian culture as standards for faith in all times. Then the only conclusion can be that there has been a great falling off, and we, of course, are the untimely born and the greatly fallen. But the faithful in every age have only Christ as their Lord, not the achievements of the past, and the response of faith is always to Him in the present toward the future. For the faithful, each age is equidistant from Christ, and perhaps only they really understand that the past is always changing and only His future is final.

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To worry about how much faith we have been given is the first slippery step toward turning faith itself into a work, and that way lies the only madness of which Christians alone are capable.

The monastic life in evidence at the Abbey appeared to many of us so perfectly fulfilled. Nearly every aspect of life seemed subjected to the rule of faith, right down to the gothic gaol nestled next to the chapel for the more obstreperous monks. But it helps our vision of the Abbey if we remember that it was not the luminous tip of a prevailing Christian culture but rather a fortress built against a superstitious and pagan culture not really so very different from our own. (I suspect some of those gargoyles carved on the Abbey tower may have covered some wagers with the old gods.) The difference between the largely pre-Christian culture in which the Abbey was begun and the largely post-Christian culture in which we stand is perhaps only the difference of nostalgias for different lost gods.

Going Against the Prevailing Culture

The robust faith in the living God which completed Fountains Abbey was a faith which went against the prevailing culture of its time at the same time that it worked with and through that culture to cleanse it of superstition and paganism and bring forth its most humane possibilities. Do not be surprised that such a cultural task is also the task of faith today and that new occasions may teach new duties. There is no one, single universal Christian culture for all times and places. There are only the possibilities of each culture in each time and place to be cleansed and claimed by the Christians present.

Indeed, in our time that task may also mean a faithful cleansing of the remnants of the vestigial Christian cultures in which we may be placed. The cultural work of faith is especially intricate and intriguing when Christian culture is vanishing where it has not already vanished. As the recent conclusion of the war in the Falklands proved, even the Archbishop of Canterbury may need to risk the wrath of the Prime Minister to suggest God does not simply bless victory in battle, even in a just cause, but mourns for the slain on all sides and lays a special claim upon the victors to rebuild the peace. We may be less inclined to idealize the medieval Christian past if we remember that then Mrs. Thatcher may have held poor Pastor Runcie in irons, or worse, for his witness of faith.

We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Our first text, from Paul, reminds us that God turns each sinner upright by His grace. This formulation for that uprighting grace of God further reminds us that no works, not even the works of Christian culture, make any of us righteous. That uprighting is God's work alone given to each of us in His gift of faith. Christians in every age receive that gift as fully as they are able, and the relative volume of faith from age to age is in His care and not a care for any of us. The "justified by faith" do not worry about how much or how little faith they have been given in comparison with others in former times, or even in their own times, but simply act upon whatever faith they have been given. To worry about faith is the first slippery step toward turning faith itself into a work, and that way lies the only madness of which Christians alone are capable.

In our time, of course, the good news that men and women are "justified by faith" has become something of a banality. To be sure, the spiritually discerning in all ages, indeed in several different religions, knew that no one works himself worthy of any of God's gifts any more than one works himself worthy of his own birth. Both being born and being "justified by faith" are profound surprises, even shocks, but the extraordinary ordinariness of both is that it is obvious both happen to us as gifts. For many in our time, however, to be "justified by faith" is not so much gloriously obvious as it is irrelevant. When one seeks nothing more than sweetening the time and cultivating complacency, this formulation of the good news is not so much old news as it is no news.

The monks at the Abbey knew that the grace of God cannot even be given away when no one is asking for it. If that is the situation of many in our time, the faithful will need to help the many ask better questions of their lives before they rush in with the good news which is no news until better questions are asked. In a post-Christian culture perhaps less zeal is needed to speak the good news which nearly everyone has heard—though surely more zeal is needed to help men and women become *responsive* to the word which they have heard. And that cultivation of responsibility is a cultural task which will probably not be done unless Christians do it.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. This is where our second text, from James, counsels the faithful that God's gift of uprighting faith is never unaccompanied by works. Faith is not only an inner disposition of the whole person, it is a public event in space and time. Paul and James are really not as much in conflict as our texts may appear if we remember that each emphasizes a different aspect of faith. (Paul stresses that aspect of faith which is trusting our lives to God for their uprightness while James stresses that aspect of faith which is assent to the preaching of Christ which makes that faith possible.) Perhaps Jesus best adjudicates between Paul and James when we remember that He called the whole life of faith and works discipleship. Certainly both Paul and James would be puzzled, indeed horrified by an empty faith without cultural questioning and creativity, and both are keen that faith fill up and overflow with all that God gives

There is plenty to do in every age to open closed minds, afflict sloth, stir imaginations, steady wills, unmuddy choices, and restore personal and social responsibility to men and women.

us to be and do.

Our second text, therefore, especially reminds us that God is interested in much more than making each sinner upright by faith. He is also as interested in the fruits of that faith which grow up in His world. The wholeness of God is never for individuals isolated out of this world—but for all of us together in this world toward the world to come. From Paul to James we are reminded that faith opens us up to our work upon the cultural vitalities of our time to help bring forth their most humane possibilities. For the faithful today that means every work against those cultural forces which leave men and women relatively closed to God's gift of faith and every work for those cultural forces which leave men and women relatively open for His gift of faith. There is plenty to do in every age to open closed minds, afflict sloth, stir imaginations, steady wills, unmuddy choices, and restore personal and social responsibility to men and women. Indeed, the supply of that work presently exceeds the demand of the faithful to do it. (Now there's a pity, for those do the best cultural work in the world who know there is no salvation in culture by itself.)

Christianity and Cultural Pluralism

The cultural creativity of faith is, of course, both complicated and enriched by God's gift of cultural pluralism in our time. Christian cultural creativity must be related, Christianly, to other cultural works informed by other faiths. This task is not new to faith, for our fathers and brothers in the faith were called to work out their faith in Christ in relation to the Hebrew culture in which He was pleased to define Himself, the Greek and Roman culture in which He set his church in the biblical age, and indeed the Norman English culture in which Fountains Abbey was built. But that task may be new to the faithful today who have not yet fully grasped their situation in a post-Christian age. And that task is not only for clergymen and clergywomen—far from it!—but for each of us in our ordinary callings of marriage, family, leisure, study, charity, labor, citizenship, and the care of the earth.

He who is not with me is against me. Here our third text, from Matthew, begins to offer us counsel. When Jesus announces that whoever or whatever is not with Him is against Him, He reminds us vividly that cultural vitalities are always grounded in one faith or another. Our cultural choices therefore must be faithfully considered for what is not "with Him" and thus "against Him." The uncomfortable truth is that our Lord makes every cultural work a question of faith when we would be happier if we could more conveniently divide our lives into what is significant for faith and what is neutral, or innocuous, or indifferent to faith. If that were so, we could with clear conscience do what we indeed do with guilty consciences, namely turn an ever narrowing realm of the world which we consider significant for faith over to salaried religious professionals and reserve an ever widening realm of the world which we consider indifferent for faith to ourselves for our worried pleasure. But Christians follow their Lord wholly into one Kingdom over the world as it is and as it is to come. He does not come to us divided to induce schizophrenia or sleep.

However, neither does our Lord make our cultural choices religiously picayune, or moralizing, or pietistic. There are times to say an uncompromising "no" to certain cultural forces, but they are probably fewer than some Christians imagine. In its context, our third text is directed at whoever or whatever speaks against the Holy Spirit. That which is not "for Him" is thus "against Him" because it blasphemes. Indeed, Jesus assures us that every sin will be forgiven, even sins against Himself, but not sins against the Spirit. How could there be forgiveness for that which denies faith when righteousness is only given to faith?

Those cultural forces which blaspheme the Spirit are forces which must be resolutely resisted even unto death, but—for the time being—those forces are not nearly so numerous among us as those forces which may only be in error, or unwise, or premature, or inadequate, or do about as much ill as they do good. To those cultural forces the faithful need not say "no." Christians are often called to say "yes, but . . ." and "well, maybe . . ." The relationship of faith to every cultural vitality is always provisional, and in some cases more provisional than others. I note, for example, that none of you seem inclined toward Fountains Abbey's ideal of monastic

The cultural work of faith proceeds piece by piece, patiently putting each part in place.

celibacy, but I hope at least some of you remain committed to its cultural ideal of learning.

He that is not against us is for us. By now you know that our fourth and final text, from Mark, does not contradict our third text. When our Lord announces that whoever or whatever "is not against us is for us," He alerts us to the possibility, indeed the necessity, for faith to make provisional alliances with those cultural vitalities which may express faith, prepare the way for faith, or even raise the questions for which faith is the answer. In its context, our text refers to one who was doing the healing works of Jesus without following Him, and our Lord was not opposed to such help toward the wholeness of the world from whatever source it came. Those who follow Him in faith are also called to use every cultural vitality which opens up the possibilities of faith and which offers faith the opportunity to work in the world.

No Christianity without Culture

There is no Christianity without culture as there is no faith without works. Fountains Abbey was not built without the cultural vitalities of the aspirations of Norman England, the loyalties of masons to the highest standards of their guilds, the artistic readiness of Flemish weavers for the wool of the Abbey's sheep, the quest for wholeness and holiness of thousands of monks, and even the pardonable pride of a succession of worldly wise abbots who evidently were shrewd at making a place for prayer and study secure by means of some hard trading. (You did expect me to say a kind word for administrators, didn't you?) Any of us should do as well as they did at his own cultural creativity today, and we all would be most blessed as a generation if our faithful cultural creativity made the rest of the world nervous that it might be missing something.

Take one last look at your experience of Fountains Abbey. Some of the stones are scattered. They may remind us that the cultural work of faith proceeds piece by piece, patiently putting each part in place. The chapel, cloisters, and tower artfully blend several different architectural styles. They may remind us that the cultural work of faith proceeds over many generations, preserving their particularity while seeking their unity. The Abbey is now in ruins. Those ruins may remind us that every cultural work of faith is provisional. But the ruins are now visited by thousands of tourists who are almost transfigured into pilgrims. That experience could remind you that no work of faith is ever lost to God, and if He can make those stones speak He also may be able to do something beautiful with us. Amen.

where foxes bark

these hills ring with my axe
and the ringing echoes down
the frozen hills
where foxes bark
in the blue ice and mist hovering
on the pond

the wood I stack in neat piles
as if to pass inspection
and busy myself with counting
Spruce and Balsam
watching for harder wood
my axe glinting against the bark

and the mist rises up the gullies
touching the lower branches
where snow balances
and far below the windows of the house
glow like eyes
and the snow muffles all sound
gives up no hint of warmth or love
or sign of things to come
as if this hill were floating in the mist
and all the stacked wood and bright axes
were phantoms
disappearing in the snow

J. T. Ledbetter

On the Ferry

Perhaps the passengers, who, in unison,
Lean over the rail, are looking for
That Icarus splash, the brief flurry
Of wings turning speck in the sea eye.

Perhaps they remember, as I do,
Some floating time, cotton wings
And the stepping into space
With children who leave their names in air.

Perhaps when Aaron, my son, pushes
Against the safety grate and tumbles
Out where I have to follow,
Knowing this is two of us to drown,
My clumsy legs will kick
So many fatherly, useless times,
Speculating yet that I can save him
From that swimming he must do.

Gary Fincke

Completing the Learning Cycle

The Place of Professional Schools in the University

David S. Luecke

The 1980s are a time of shifting focus in higher education. The shift was reflected symbolically in the 1980 registration figures for Valparaiso University. That year the College of Arts and Sciences became a minority division of the University. For the first time, its enrollment showed up as less than half the total. The student bodies of the professional divisions—Business, Engineering, Law, and Nursing—became the dominant presence in the University.

Valparaiso University is of course not unique in witnessing the trend toward greater student interest in studies with a professional focus. Around the country, engineering and business undergraduate enrollments burgeoned in the 1970s. Law schools expanded. So did other applied specialities, such as journalism. The new pattern of student preferences represented an enrollment shift, not an add-on. On most campuses, there has been a decline in the number of students majoring in the central liberal arts areas of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

That enrollment patterns are different is now readily apparent to the higher education community. So are some of the implications. New faculty positions in the traditional liberal arts have all but disappeared, while many professional programs show a touch of desperation in their search for qualified instructors. Pressures on compensation patterns are an inevitable result. There is plenty of reason to see the shift as painful, especially from a liberal arts perspective.

But from the perspective of a university's overall dedication to the learning process, there is reason to see a beneficial implication. Expressing what that might be is the present intent.

Professional programs have an educational contribution to make in a liberal arts environment beyond maintaining enrollment levels and feeding general education courses. They can create a productive tension that gets to the heart of the educational enterprise, as pursued by all participants, not just their own.

One way to formulate that beneficial tension is presented as well as anywhere in a Valparaiso University statement about its character:

> The aim of liberal education is to understand reality and render it intelligible. It does this through the development of arts and disciplines which enable a person to understand our cultural heritage and to investigate social and natural phenomena. . . . The aim of professional education is to enable a person to intervene in particular situations on behalf of clients, who may be individuals, groups, or communities. Thus professional education tends to focus on action and its consequences. . . . Professional faculty and their students are purposive and competency oriented. They impart these qualities to the whole University. (*Valparaiso University Self Study*, 1977, pp. 24-25.)

The most fundamental contribution of the increasing professional presence in higher education is an emphasis on defined purpose and competence. To a profession-oriented faculty the value of that emphasis, of course, seems obvious. Energetic attention to working out those definitions follows in intent and practice.

Receiving Questions with Impatience

It is unlikely that faculty in the traditional liberal arts would aggressively disagree with such educational values. Yet it is unlikely that on their own many will pursue such definitions as a high priority in thinking about their work. Typically questions of what one is going to do with the knowledge generated in these various disciplines are received with reluctance and varying degrees of impatience. From that perspective, scientific investigation and cultural understanding in and of themselves should remain primary values, without a need to dwell on practical applications. Those values are reason enough for the educational pursuit.

Thus what professional programs call for in their campus presence often comes to liberal arts faculty as an irritant. Now the shift in enrollments makes the irritant all the more unavoidable. Yet it is just those bothersome questions of learning purpose and competency results that can stimulate educational improvement campus-wide.

Another way to look at the challenge present in professional programs is offered in an interesting view of the learning process formulated by psychologist David A. Kolb. It has been very useful, on the one hand, for

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helping business students understand why they are expected to put so much of their effort into learning seemingly impractical things, as well as why they spend so much of their time (half of the curriculum) in general education courses. It can perhaps also be useful, on the other hand, for describing how the interests and perspectives of profession-oriented students fit productively into the educational give-and-take of a university community.

Kolb suggests that the learning process is really a four-stage cycle. It starts with experiences, which are translated into concepts, which in turn are used as guides in the choice of new experiences. He calls the four stages Concrete Experience, which leads to Reflective Observation, on the basis of which Abstract Conceptualizing is developed. That leads on to Active Experimentation, testing concepts in new situations. Such guided experimentation produces new experiences and a repetition of the cycle. This sort of scheme is not unique in learning theory.

Where the model gets more interesting is in Kolb's suggestion that individuals develop differing abilities and interests in each of these stages. Those result in distinctive learning styles. Some people are most comfortable dwelling on reflections from their experience, concentrating on new observations. Others have minds that excel in assimilating disparate observations into coherent theories, but that lose interest in deducing practical applications from their theories. Still others characteristically concentrate mostly on that next stage, accepting concepts and then experimenting with their implications. Finally, some remain closely oriented to handling concrete experience and reach back in the cycle for whatever has been found useful.

In his research Kolb developed a Learning-Style Inventory designed to measure an individual's strengths and weaknesses in these stages of the learning cycle. The Inventory involves forced self-choice of adjectives the individual would use to describe his or her own characteristic way of learning. Use of the inventory among a number of respondents demonstrates some revealing differences in learning style.

In a study of practicing managers and graduate students of management, Kolb found a particularly interesting relationship between the inventory-determined learning styles and the undergraduate majors of the respondents. Those who had a relatively strong emphasis on the first part of the cycle—reflection on experience—tended to have majored in history, political science, English, or psychology. Kolb called them divergers. Assimilators emphasized the next stage of theory building, and those who had that strength tended to come from college majors in economics, mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Engineering and nursing were the dominant majors for those who emphasized convergent thinking, moving from abstract concepts to active experimentation. Undergraduate business majors tended to be associated with the remaining emphasis on experimentation and concrete experience, which Kolb called the accommodator style.

That these differing learning styles and academic experiences are associated is really not surprising. Intuitive categorization of student personalities observed in the various majors would likely result in a similar differentiation. The statistical descriptions would undoubtedly be even more pronounced if a learning-style inventory were administered to a total campus population. Such descriptions leave a basic question. Do people choose fields that are consistent with their learning style or is their learning style shaped by their academic experience? Kolb guesses it is a combination of the two factors.

For present purposes, it is revealing to note some common characteristics of the majors associated with Kolb's learning styles. Those clustered in the first two stages of the cycle are found in the traditional liberal arts. Those in the second half are in professional programs. Whatever else separates the two types of education, they tend to deal with different learning styles.

What Uses of a Descriptive Model?

What use is this descriptive model of something so much a part of a university's special character? In itself the discussion to this point is a reflection of the beginning stages of the learning cycle. What are the implications for the finishing stages of experimenting with the concept and using it to select new experiences?

The formulation of that question carries within itself a major assumption. The best learning moves thoroughly through all four stages. Learning is a cycle that starts with experience and, one way or another, finds its way back to experience. Its purposeful pursuit is best done by seeing that each stage along the way is well looked after.

One of the implications of the learning cycle is the suggestion that a dominant learning style is both a strength and a weakness. The strength of being relatively adept at either observing, or conceptualizing, or deducing, or applying insights is evident. But an individual or group which does one especially well also tends to do the others less well. How will improvement in overall learning most likely result? By getting help with the weak stages, not just working harder on the strong one.

Such an approach to improving learning skills finds two applications in developing management problem-solving abilities. It could be recognized as having

Professional students usually feel a legitimate right to ask, How will this course or experience make me a better engineer, or manager, or nurse? They deserve an answer to that question.

similar applications in the ongoing development of the educational life of a university with the varying strengths—and weaknesses—of its student body and disciplines.

A good introductory assignment to participants gathered in a management development program is to divide them into four groups according to their dominant learning styles, as roughly determined by the inventory. Then each group can be asked to design a supervisory setting that would best utilize the expected strengths and compensate for the anticipated weaknesses of the group most opposite in style (divergers design for convergers, accomodators for assimilators, and vice versa). Each can also be asked to reflect on how the opposite group is likely to perceive them and react to their supervision.

Sharing these designs in general discussion often brings several common experiences. One is greater awareness that learning tasks really are perceived differently and that one's own emphasis can be constructively challenged. Another is that each style can lead to productive contributions if it is sensitively stimulated and channeled. Most discussions also lead to a greater interest in developing teams of colleagues who can compensate for each other's weaknesses by having all the styles well represented and energetically interacting. The exercise finds its most direct pay-off in the management team building that can result.

A second application comes in the classroom with undergraduates, especially those pursuing professional studies. The model offers some help for dealing with the tension that often arises between students and faculty. Among other things, university faculty are different from students in that they have unusually developed strengths in one or more of the learning stages that follow or precede concrete experience. It is ultimately that difference which students are paying for in their education. But those strengths can come across as continual reminders of student learning style weaknesses, particularly if the students see themselves as action and experience oriented. What faculty are presenting and asking for then seems frustrating and irrelevant. Emphasizing the full learning cycle and its contribution to the final stage of performance competence can reduce resistance to being stretched into unfamiliar territory. The full range of serious scientific and cultural understandings then becomes more meaningful.

Such stretching can occur beyond faculty-student exchanges when students recognize opportunities to encounter different types of learning strengths from students in other fields. Presumably that is one of the main purposes for pursuing professional education on a campus where liberal arts majors are well represented. Mingling and studying with liberal arts students presents occasions for professional students to expand horizons. One specific opportunity, for instance, is in discovering the moral implications of professional decision making. Professional students have a way of letting the technical action demands of such decisions keep their perspectives narrow. Getting the reactions of fellow students in other fields who are keen on reflective observation or assimilative theorizing can be very productive—when the value of those strengths is appreciated.

Are There Learning Needs of Faculty?

To this point, though, the application of learning style insights is somewhat self-evident. Clearly students can learn from faculty, and the professions from the liberal arts. That discussion has its place when aimed at the learning needs of students in the professional programs. What about the learning needs of faculty? Is there an application in particular for the learning needs of faculty who find a comfortable intellectual home in the traditional liberal arts?

As suggested earlier, these distinctions find their biggest pay-off in team building efforts. Basic for that purpose is the realization that a dominant learning style is both a strength and a weakness. The weakness is that other stages in the learning cycle will be pursued less well, especially as reliance is increasingly placed on the dominant style.

Faculty typically have learning styles that are weaker in the final stages of practical application than in the intermediate stages. It is as natural for them as for anyone else to let task horizons be narrowed to what they do well. Yet the pursuit of well-rounded, full-cycle educational offerings would call for resisting such self-serving narrowness. Faculty have as much of a continuing need to be stretched into their weaker stages as anybody else trying to improve learning.

Such stretching is what profession-oriented students can do. Tugging at others to complete the cycle can be their special role in the university community. They usually feel a legitimate right to ask, How will this course or experience make me a better engineer, or manager, or nurse? They deserve an answer. Sometimes the answer is easy. Often it is not, especially in a university environment committed to transcending vocationalism. Maybe what they are asked to do will "only" make them better persons. That is still an answer that can and needs to be explained over and over again. Persistent questioning about how that result will come about can be impatiently put down as impertinent. Or it can be accepted as a stimulant for renewed probing of the basics of education. Having to face career-minded

students who expect to stress performance competency can be as stimulating for liberal arts faculty as it can be for their professional program colleagues.

In recent decades an odd phrase has appeared in the problem-solving vocabulary of such areas of practical affairs as politics and business. The ultimate put-down for an argument that is not worth considering any more is that it is "academic." Even academicians can be heard using it. The understood meaning is that whatever distinction is being made serves no useful purpose; in practice it is irrelevant. How strange that there would be such a ready association of academic with useless. What it reflects at a minimum is a popular perception that what faculty types do usually falls short of closing the learning cycle. Somewhere in that usage is a message for improving faculty styles of inquiry.

Differences in Faculty Strengths

In comparison to students, university faculty across disciplines would look fairly similar in their clustering of style strengths. However, within the very select population of faculty themselves, relative differences would undoubtedly appear on a learning style inventory. It is not unreasonable to expect those differing strengths to follow the pattern of disciplines described according to the undergraduate majors of the managers studied by Kolb. Faculty in the traditional liberal arts would tend to emphasize one or the other of the first two stages of the cycle in their personal style, while faculty in the professional programs would appear stronger in one or the other of the latter two.

As already noted, confronting those differing styles can be very helpful in management development programs. How beneficial would such a deliberate discussion be in faculty development within a university? It is interesting to speculate on what might emerge if a frank exchange of perceptions of style strengths and weaknesses were encouraged across disciplines. It is the hope of improving their results that helps managers overcome a natural reluctance to engage in such constructive confrontation and strength sharing. Keeping sights set on improving the prospects of having well-educated graduates might help faculty overcome a similar reluctance.

English faculty occasionally talk with engineering faculty about the educational needs of engineering students. The presence of an English requirement provides a minimal working relationship. But do engineering faculty ever get involved with their English colleagues in talking about the learning needs of English majors? The two groups could expect to share little about the knowledge substance of that area. They predictably would also have very different styles in understanding educational needs. Those are two very good reasons to stay in distant corners. But that matter of style might also be the source of some provocative questions about purpose and emphases. If the exchange were seriously undertaken, some useful stretching might occur.

Could business and theology faculties get into constructive discussions about the teaching of theology? There is precedent for a worthwhile exchange. A number of theology professors from around the country have found themselves participating in lengthy summer seminars at the Harvard Business School. They go there to experience the case method of learning and to incorporate it into their own styles. There are reports that they have benefited from the experience.

There is no doubt that professional program faculty use their liberal arts colleagues. They use them not only to teach general education courses in the professional curriculum, but they also look to their disciplines to provide early stage models and skills for their own applied endeavors.

As professional programs and faculty become more visible on university campuses, how can liberal arts faculties use them? Their students can do more for the university than maintain slipping enrollments in general education courses. Their faculty can do more than provide evidence of campus diversity. Their emphasis on completing the learning cycle can be used as a source of creative tension. To be found somewhere in that tension is the stimulus for educational improvement for everyone.

Derek

To my oldest son, already
Listening, in his room,
To the bare tree wind rhythm
Of his growing away from me,
I am sending my father's old lies
About how the stones are not dead,
How fire is a friend to count on.

I am writing on his window
In the heavy breath of aging
The embarrassing lines of love.

In the morning these deceits
Will drip into the bushes.
Caught in the overnight webs,
The stories will softly buzz,
Like insects, like clocks.

Gary Fincke

Interview

W. S. DiPiero: Memory and Enthusiasm

Richard Maxwell

Memory includes not simply recollections of one's own life but also the racial memory one is always trying to get at.

Richard Maxwell: Someone commented last night that your poems seem to have been written by an old man, at least a man older than thirty-six; that the poems are about memory, looking back. This is certainly true of the title poem in *Solstice,* where you write,

> Thimble-cones crushed by winter's brief/ shadows
> aren't meant for remembering. Sparrow-/ tattle,
> rabbits in the pine-ruck, a field mouse
> pushing a dropped maple leaf.

And then, a little later in the poem—

> We've got one hickory log
> left to burn, and we feel the present as/ something past
> lived out before it's remembered.

Explicitly or otherwise, memory is a theme of this book. Could you comment?

W. S. DiPiero: The British painter Francis Bacon has a phrase that he uses, "working off one's own nervous system," by which he means absolute involvement in a moment of creation. What stands in back of the moment in which one is living off nerves is memory. The poem you read comes from both sources. It is written off the nerves and also out of memory. It tries to express an instant recognition of mortality, mortality understood in a communal context.

R.M.: Your essay in *The Southern Review,* "Memory and Enthusiasm," sets up a kind of poetics. Could you talk about the relation between memory and enthusiasm, the way you use those words?

WSD: I speak of memory as that which is located in lived experience—not something abstract but sensuous. Memory includes not simply recollections of one's own life but also the racial memory which one is constantly trying to get at. It's what Yeats was trying in his Byzantium poems.

RM: How does the other term, enthusiasm, fit in?

WSD: When you are open to all the particulars of the world and of history, you can respond simply by the poetic equivalent of leaping up and down and saying "ooh la la"—which is one kind of enthusiasm.

RM: Are there any poems in *Solstice* which might be the poetic equivalent of leaping up and down?

WSD: No—because my own instincts tell me that this mindless enthusiasm can affect the beginnings of poetry but do not constitute it all. I look for the structure of enthusiasm, just as for the structure of memory. It's that which concerns me.

RM: Is this like Wordsworth recollecting emotion in tranquillity?

WSD: Despite his own formula, when Wordsworth recollects things he's not especially tranquil lots of the times. He gets excited when he starts thinking about his previous visits to Tintern Abbey. At the end of the Intimations Ode, he seems somehow to express a full-bodied jubilance, while not sacrificing the knowledge he has taken away. Perhaps that's the ideal, to have that full-bodied enthusiasm without sacrificing articulation. Keats' "To Autumn" is perhaps a better example than anything in Wordsworth. That poem appears to come out of nowhere and go back into it. It's almost purely celebrative, a wild naming of things. And yet at the center of it there is a consciousness which orders the details. Keats really does seem to be filled with a god. But at the same time what he says is structured, articulate. Maybe that's the idea.

RM: You say in a poem from *Solstice* that all seeing is dramatic action. That seems to be what we are talking about: a conflict or maybe balance between the physical world and thinking.

WSD: I see things that live in extraordinary wealth, the wealth of the world. The world can seem a fragmentary hodgepodge, gorgeous in details, gorgeous in all its panoramas. If I'm going to write poems about it, the poems will come out of my own encounter with the field of vision. The point becomes to make sense of the pattern; to question the lack of pattern; to question the authorship of patterns, sources, origins.

Richard Maxwell *teaches English at Valparaiso University and is the regular Film critic for* The Cresset.

W. S. DiPiero *was poet in residence at Valparaiso University for several days during Spring 1982, when this interview was taped. Mr. DiPiero's poetry and translations from the Italian have appeared in many journals. His recent* Solstice *was issued by Porch Publications. His translation of Leopardi's* Pensieri *is available from Louisiana State University Press and his translation of Euripides's* Ion, *in collaboration with William Arrowsmith, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Mr. DiPiero currently teaches at Stanford University.*

RM: "Angles" says something like that: it also rejects an alternate possibility. You describe

> a dream in which a hammerclaw of/ words
> jams in your throat, reminding you that/ eloquence
> is never its own reward. You have one/ choice to make:
> sit facing a wall forever, flattered by sur-/ faces,
> or do anything else at all.

WSD: Yes: to sit facing a wall divided by surfaces can be very nice. Quiet, painless, tranquil. Intellectual death.

RM: Do some poets suffer that death?

WSD: Sure. One of the problems in a lot of contemporary verse is an abundant and exclusive attention to the surfaces of experience and the surfaces of the poem as they seek to shimmer with those experiences. You can call this dandyism. Dandyism is excessive attention to one's appearance and the studious development of affectation in order to have a recognizable identity. When a poet becomes a dandy, he no longer pays enough attention to subject matter, to theme.

RM: I'll present you with an argument. Many of the finest nineteenth-century poets cultivated dandyism and it seems to me that they did so fruitfully. Take Byron, the broken dandy lately on his travels. Baudelaire for that matter is a fascinating user of dandyism. These are people for whom dandyism is not just a superficial cultivation of appearances but an almost necessary way of preserving identity in a world which seems to be homogenous, blurring over.

WSD: Sure, but what you are talking about is dandyism as a subject rather than dandyism simply as a mode of writing. Byron exploits his line and his verse in *Don Juan* as a way of dramatizing the frequent humor with which he himself regards the role of the dandy. So what we get in these cases is a drama of identity. By comparison, a contemporary poet like Mark Strand engages in a sort of glum dandyism.

RM: It's painful to imagine a glum dandyism: there's a celebration of surfaces which has not even the brio of an accomplished dandyism and so gets the worst of two worlds.

WSD: Part of the problem may be an aesthetic which believes that the most intense poetry, the finest poetry, is utterly internal. It's spaces within one's own psyche that become fascinating, so one writes about those spaces. Then one sees shadows in them and writes about the shadows. And suddenly everything that's out there is gone.

RM: What is the state of American poetry publishing right now?

WSD: They've inaugurated a national poetry series founded by James Michener and some other rich people to allow commercial publishers to publish books of poems. What has happened very quickly is that it has become a political series. The people who are asked to solicit manuscripts solicit them from friends. The series has become suspect. Knopf recently started a poetry series. They tend to favor poets who have published a great deal in the *New Yorker.* That is, they tend to publish rather harmless, innocuous, descriptive poets who are New Yorkers or known in New York.

RM: Where does the *good* poetry publishing come from?

WSD: You take it where you can get it. You can't generalize and say, well, New York is corrupt so we must look to the university presses. They do just as much undistinguished work, maybe more. What about small presses? It's a question of picking and choosing. The future of poetry publishing is in so many different kinds of hands. I know that most university presses do not make their own decisions. They rely on outside readers. It's possible for someone to write a fine book of poems, which is then sent out to John Frederick Nims [editor of *Poetry*] and Nims might say, "This poetry is no good because it doesn't have any images in it. It's not hard. It's not crisp. It's not tough. It's not clear, blah, blah, blah." So the university press writes back to the poet and says, "Sorry, we can't publish your book—our expert says it's no good." One person says no and it's no.

RM: You're describing a situation in which the publishing world itself is almost incredibly fragmented and in fact so are the standards for poetry. Have there been times in the modern world when there have been so many standards for kinds of poems?

WSD: I don't know any precedent—nothing that matches it. It's partly because of differences in wealth and in magnitude in the publishing industry these days. It's also because public taste has been pretty bad most of the time. Let me give an example.

William Carlos Williams, whose imitators are now being published by trade publishers, was fifty-five years old before he published a book of poems for which he himself did not have to pay. He did not have a publisher who would make a commitment to publishing his work on a regular basis until he was almost sixty. He had a kind of public identity as the bad boy of American writers who also happened to be a physician and didn't have enough sense to move to New York where he could have been successful. That was the public perception of Williams, who wrote some of the great poems of our times.

RM: Therefore it's the happy few who have time to make the decisions themselves who are going to be reading poetry in a way that means anything. This is possibly an important point because there is such a tradition in America of saying that literature should be open to a vast reading public. But you don't see this happening?

WSD: No, I don't. After all, we live in a prose civilization. All the skills that are taught from kindergarten on up are prose skills. Poetry is taught as a highly technical discipline. You have to have technical skills, which are difficult to acquire, if you're going to read a poem. All this baloney is fed to kids from the time they are very young. And later you are not taught to read poetry; you are taught to interpret it.

We live in a prose civilization. All the skills that are taught from kindergarten on up are prose skills.

RM: How do you teach poetry?

WSD: Many of my students are not poetry readers. So I have them read a lot and I have them talk in detail under interrogation by me about the poems they have read. I urge them to allow themselves to be delighted by poems before anything else. But you know—I think a twenty-year-old college student can take up, say, short stories by William Gass, a book that really does issue from the apparent revolutions of modernism, and *enjoy* that book: hear the different voices in it. Students who read *As I Lay Dying* for the first time get thirty pages into it and have some sense of what's going on. That is partly because of the instincts we develop as readers. All prose instincts.

RM: What is a poetry instinct?

WSD: First of all, to be able to hear a line: to have some sense of the music and structure of a line.

RM: How do you hear a line?

WSD: This is going to be difficult. The music that I hear in my head, I can never get that voice. However, listen to a very short poem, "Odysseus":

> There is no world
> to speak of, no end
> of home or country.
> Every breath
> a going. A gull
> cries in my dream
> of one hundred ways.
> She waits, silent
> sea-foam wife.
> The wind, no world,
> speaks for me.

When I hear that poem I know that underneath is a line built on two heavy stresses. I try to pick up in the structure something of the fatefulness of Odysseus, a man who is destined.

RM: What kind of audience can an American poet expect?

WSD: Every writer I know has one or two friends to whom he shows his work and whose opinions he values. They constitute his audience. He may not have a much larger audience than that, and if he does he may not be aware that he has it. It's that small audience which is first of all important, and it comprises a community. Montale says that his favorite metaphor for the distribution of poetry is the message in the bottle. You have no idea who's going to find the bottle, nor if he can read, nor if he cares to read poetry. If he does, you're going to reach someone.

RM: Seeing isolation through that metaphor puts a rather different light on it. Thank you for talking with us.

Theatre

Language and Reality—Part II

The Sad Gay World Of *Torch Song Trilogy*

John Steven Paul

From a platform that fairly floats in the darkness above the stage, the lady blues singer suffers through the last several strains of her torch song. The lighting slowly draws a figure out of the darkness: another singer, one of ample flesh stuffed into a tawdry sheath studded with sequins, one with massive head wedged in a satiny cloche, one putting on a face at a lighted vanity. The voice, a basso rasp, a buzz saw cracking smart-mouth remarks through pursed and flaming red lips, identifies the gowned one as a man. Arnold Beckoff—he of the body, the lips, and the voice—is a female impersonator; no, actually, he's a drag queen.

Torch Song Trilogy trails Arnold Beckoff through the tragicomic labyrinth of gay (mostly love) life. Arnold's is a character comprised of contradictions: hard-edged *and* sensitive, tough *and* fragile, sophisticated *and* innocent. He is virtually a catalog of human emotions, most

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John Steven Paul *teaches Speech and Drama at Valparaiso University and is* The Cresset*'s regular Theatre critic.*

Torch Song Trilogy is strong stuff. The author does nothing to modify his material to make it easy for audiences. But neither does he sensationalize or titillate.

of which are forced out of him under the intense and incessant pressure which is, according to playwright Harvey Fierstein, the essence of the homosexual experience in a predominantly heterosexual culture.

Torch Song Trilogy is strong stuff. Fierstein does nothing to modify his material to make it easy for audiences. And why should he? Why should any part of human experience be represented as something it is not? At the same time, it must be said that Fierstein has not exploited or exaggerated his material for the sake of sensationalism or titillation; though the play has much to do with love and sex, it is not explicit, and the lights are turned off at potentially offensive moments. Still, the heterosexual playgoer with "traditional" values and lifestyle must be patient during the first quarter-hour of *Torch Song*—the characters and the situation are discomforting, even extremely so. But that patience is rewarded with insight, enlightenment if you will, as Harvey Fierstein gradually builds trust with his audience. Besides, it's a very entertaining show.

The first play of the trilogy, *The International Stud* (named for a Manhattan gay bar), is a fairly typical story of a twenty-four year old in search of true and lasting love instead of a series of sexual episodes. When Ed, a likely candidate for a long-term relationship, makes his way to Virginia Hamm's (Arnold's stage name) dressing room after a show and proffers his affection, Arnold falls hopefully in love with him. Now, Ed is the all-American type: all blonde-haired, blue-eyed intelligence, tastefully-developed, non-intimidating musculature, and sexual ambivalence bordering on confusion. Ed doesn't know what he wants, but he'll walk over anyone and everyone to get it.

Ed makes friends and then love with Arnold, but he keeps the closet door wide open behind him and himself prepared to step back in should the situation call for it. When he meets a girl named Laurel, Ed reneges on his promises to Arnold and with one phone call relegates their relationship to Arnold's long list of brief and sad encounters. Arnold's old wound is reopened.

In order to hasten the scarring process, Arnold drifts over to the International Stud with his pal Murray. There is a front room and a back room at this place. The front room is for picking up, the back room for backing up—a particularly sad and degrading form of sexual gratification during which the partners never see each other's face. Arnold looks for love even in this type of encounter that, by its very nature, can only be emotionally traumatic. He is so pathetically naive that when he discovers his backroom lover has departed without a word, his deep hurt is mixed with genuine astonishment.

When Ed returns to the dressing room after a space of several months, he finds Arnold in a thornily self-protective posture—sarcastic, derisive, and mean. While never confessing his love for Arnold, Ed asks for another chance at a relationship. Arnold is fully aware of the pain he is inviting; his compulsion to love fights with his fear of not being loved. And, finally, he lets Ed drive him home.

The International Stud, then, establishes the identity of the central character and the rhythm of *Torch Song Trilogy.* The rhythm of Arnold's existence is rejection, retreat, repair, return, rejection, retreat, and so on. He has come to know it so well he is almost reassured by its regularity. Emotional pain is Arnold's friend; the torch song, a celebration of love-pain, is his emblem.

For the first play, Fierstein combines the smart-mouthed alternation of insults and comebacks, a form perfected by Neil Simon in plays like *The Odd Couple,* with the episodic structure of a cabaret. The second, *Fugue in a Nursery,* is a kind of homosexual comedy of manners, complete with witty repartee, comic comment on social and sexual mores, and a cast full of types. Arnold is here and so is Ed, who has now rationalized his confusion as bisexuality. Laurel, Ed's girl, has been through a number of affairs including two with married men and two (previously) with men who realized their bisexual orientation while they were involved with her. Finally there is Alan, who is eighteen years old, exceptionally handsome, boyishly rugged, a hustler—and Arnold's steady.

In *Fugue,* Fierstein mixes these characters and relationships like musical figures. Indeed, the action is accompanied by a string ensemble. The play takes place in an enormous round bed sloped toward the audience and strewn with Easter-egg-colored bedding. In the pairing and shuffling, each character dialogs with each of the others. The subject of the dialog is the rights and responsibilities of lovers to one another. The climax of the play comes when Ed and Alan engage in more than dialog. Afterward, Arnold and Laurel are left to pick up and analyze the pieces. It is abundantly clear that the gay former lover and the straight fiancee have one important thing in common: pain.

At the end of *Fugue,* Arnold and Alan have defined their relationship and signed a contract to certify their commitment to one another. Ed and Laurel have gotten married. Five years separate *Fugue* from the beginning of the third play, *Widows and Children First!.* Ed and Laurel have separated; Arnold is without Alan. Alan's murder by a gang of youths with baseball bats seems to have been a product of anti-homosexual bigotry. There is a new character, David, a fifteen-year-old former battered child and veteran of three different foster homes. David

Torch Song is concerned with the search for commonalities, not only among its characters, but also between the gay world on stage and the straight world beyond.

is gay. He has been placed with Arnold under a special program which matches homosexual children with homosexual adoptive parents. Ed, on the rebound from Laurel, is spending a few days with Arnold and David and the boy begins to view Arnold's former lover as a potential father. At present, Arnold, David, and Ed are anxiously awaiting the imminent arrival of Arnold's Jewish mother, a widow from Miami Beach.

Ma Beckoff carries her cognizance of Arnold's homosexuality like the weight of the world. She is almost involuntarily derisive toward her effeminate son and masterfully adept at shifting her burden to her son's guilt-ridden shoulders. The perennial question of this mother-son relationship is whether Ma can come to accept Arnold's lifestyle and, more importantly, the self from which that lifestyle naturally flows. In *Widows* the question is posed in connection with Arnold's plan to adopt David. Ma, who has never conceded the possibility of a domestic arrangement between men equivalent to one between a man and a woman, is appalled at the idea. That a social service agency could sanction such a plan is a sign to her of the craziness of the modern world. To air their differences, Ma and Arnold resort to an apparently long-standing Beckoff tradition, the pitched verbal battle.

Despite their strong feelings about David, the Beckoff argument centers on the issue of who has the right to more grief over the loss of a spouse. Arnold contends that his mother had it relatively easy when after thirty-five years of marriage her husband died of an illness in a "nice clean hospital," while Alan was murdered in the street after a brief five years of conjugality. Ma spits contempt at her son's comparison of his loss with hers. Their positions having hardened, the breach between them is unbridgeable, and Ma prepares for an immediate return flight to Florida.

But a farewell interview with David arouses her deep maternal feelings. She senses the boy's desperate need for a parent and recognizes Arnold's need to parent—a need similar to her own. From her perception of that common need, Ma progresses to some understanding of Arnold's loss and, finally, shares with her son her experience as a widow. Then, sadly, she leaves the three men to themselves.

Deeper than the deepest differences that distinguish groups of people from one another lie fundamental human needs, pains, and desires.

Ma leaves Arnold's apartment acutely aware of the variances between her son's world and her own. Yet she has glimpsed some fundamental human commonalities in those variant worlds. Deeper than the deepest differences that distinguish groups of humans from one another lie similarities such as the pain of rejection and loss, the need to care and to be cared for, and the desire for a link between personal identity and social entity. *Torch Song Trilogy* is concerned with the search for commonalities, not only among the *dramatis personae,* but also between the world of Harvey Fierstein's play and those members of the audience who have more in common with Laurel and Ma Beckoff than with Ed, David, and Arnold.

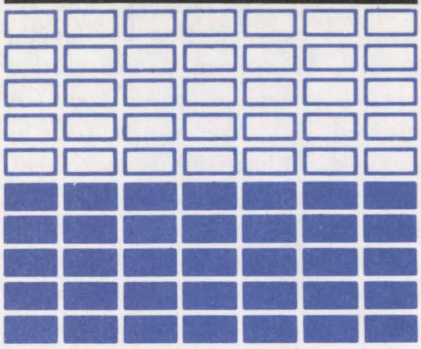
Torch Song illustrates one of the difficulties of discovering commonalities between groups whose realities seem absolutely disparate. Like Brian Friel in his play about the Irish and English of the 1830s, *Translations* (see *Cresset,* December, 1982), Fierstein roots the conflict between homosexual and heterosexual communities in language issues. In addition to other prerogatives, the dominant community retains official control over the language and resents its expropriation by deviant groups. Permission to use certain words—*homosexual, queer, faggot*—is granted. But other words, such as *husband, wife, marriage, mother, father, family, home,* and *widow* become words to fight over.

One comes away from a performance of *Torch Song Trilogy* with the conviction that a significant barrier between homosexual and heterosexual could be broken down were problems in the signification of underlying commonalities solved. Because the theatre *is* human character in action, it has always and can continue to reveal the universals underlying apparently disparate bits of human experience.

The theatre depends for successful character revelation on the intimate relationship between actor and audience. Frankly, I did not *want* to be intimate with Arnold Beckoff! Arnold is a gross characterization of a person with whom I simply cannot identify. Yet, after an evening with him and his problems, I felt a sense of kinship with this character and the stirrings of a sense of responsibility due one's kin.

It is Harvey Fierstein who makes this play work and is responsible for the emergent truth of the production. His performance as Arnold Beckoff is the glue that binds together the fragments of this rather protracted theatre piece. I have little knowledge of the playwright's biography, but if he's not actually Arnold, then I have rarely witnessed such profound sympathy by an actor for his character. He and *Torch Song* are like Siamese twins joined at the heart: separation would likely be fatal. Fatal too, no doubt, for the audience's appreciation of the play, for Fierstein's gritty, outrageous, witty, contagious, and unfailingly human performance is the very steady bridge over a ravine dividing two worlds of human experience.

Campus Diary



A Cloud of Witnesses

John Strietelmeier

One of the sad things about growing older is that from time to time one looks back over the years and realizes that he has lost touch with too many friends who were once important to him. It is thus a special grace when something comes along—a reunion, perhaps, or a visit, or a book of memoirs—to refresh memories that had grown dim of people who, though not forgotten, had not been in one's recollection for quite some time.

In my own case, some of my happiest and proudest memories are of the old Lutheran Human Relations crowd of the early 1950s. Standing as I did on the fringe of this crowd, I had no doubt at all that I was on the level of eye contact with greatness. Walter Heyne often waved when he walked past me. Clem Sabourin knew me by name. Martin Nees once sat at the same table with me. Tommy Coates smiled once at something I said. Les Frerking shook hands with me. Most remarkably and fatefully of all, St. Andrew Schulze took me as a kind of disciple and, for the next thirty years, kept prodding me with gentle reminders that I had been baptized and ought to show an occasional sign of it.

Andy went to Heaven last Spring and Margaret, his wife and alter ego, shortly thereafter. And then, in July, I got a little paperback book from the Reverend Samuel L. Hoard. (*Almost a Layman.* By Samuel L. Hoard. LVS Church Supplies, 109 Allamenda Drive, Lakeland, Florida 33803. 63 pages. Paperback. $4.95 plus $1.05 shipping.) Sam, who is now an M.S.W. and a D.D. and a retired officer in the Chaplains Corps, was one of us hero-worshipping young folk out on the fringe of LHRAA. I was always a little bit in awe of him because he seemed so much more adult and secure and sophisticated than I. Unfortunately, we did not see enough of each other to become close friends. But in that early LHRAA network there was a tie of love and respect that bound pretty tightly, even across the geographical and psychological distances imposed by our callings.

Sam's book is no literary masterpiece. And while to me it is well worth the price, it probably wouldn't be to most people. It is, in some ways, a story we have heard so often that we are tired of it, the story of a bright, ambitious black boy growing up in a white church and eventually, after many rebuffs and discouragements, becoming a pastor in that church, only to find that, in spite of his ordination, he was still "almost a layman" in the racist thinking of many of the Lutheran Christians he was called to serve. Almost any black pastor in a white, mainline denomination would have a similar story to tell.

But Sam tells his story well. And if the experiences of his life have left him bitter, he certainly conceals it very well. Indeed, he can even see the humor in events and circumstances that many of us would surely judge more harshly. He does, of course, recount incidents which remind us that Christian people and their leaders really are, as Luther said, at the same time saints and sinners. But he is generous also in naming those who encouraged him on the way and, when necessary, championed his cause against fearful and mistaken brethren.

God never leaves Himself without witnesses. Whenever the Church finds itself in a real crisis, He literally compasses it about with a great cloud of witnesses. And so it was in those critical days when the civil rights movement left the Church no choice but to testify or to deny. *Almost a Layman* contains a list of contemporary saints and confessors which would make a worthy addendum to Hebrews 11: Otis Finley, Elmer Foelber, Paul Amt, Louis Dorn, Bob Epp, Arno Scholz, Arnold Krentz, Erwin Kurth, John Stach, Ralph Moellering, Marmaduke Carter, Ralph Egolf, William Puder, Richard Neuhaus, Art Simon, Paul Simon. And these names suggest others who are not mentioned in this book, but who in those decisive days "stoood at Armageddon and battled for the Lord." Some of them, two decades later, would find themselves on opposite sides of the liberal-conservative fence, and thus unhappily estranged from each other. But even in that estrangement the memory of happier days helped greatly to preserve a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I knew some contemporaries of Sam's, black Lutheran pastors who had not been fortunate enough to find a Paul Amt or an Elmer Foelber or an Andy Schulze or an O. P. Kretzmann to run interference for them. Some of them had remarkable gifts, both of the intellect and of the spirit, but they were never given the opportunity to develop them. They, too, could write a book. And maybe they should—if only to remind us that, while the Spirit is always and powerfully at work in the Church, the world is there, too, with all its corrosive power.